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TO

MY WIFE

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CONTENTS

		PAGE
I.	JAMES ELROY FLECKER: AN APPRECIATION AND SOME PERSONAL MEMORIES . .	1
II.	THREE GEORGIAN NOVELISTS — COMPTON MACKENZIE—HUGH WALPOLE—GILBERT CANNAN	37
III.	THE LATER WORK OF D. H. LAWRENCE .	65
IV.	MR. WELLS AND THE WAR . . .	79
V.	THE WAR AND THE POETS . . .	99
VI.	AN OUTBURST ON GISSING . . .	123
VII.	THE AUTHOR OF "TARR" . . .	133
VIII.	THE GORDON SELFRIDGE OF ENGLISH LETTERS	145
IX.	REDDING "ON WINES"	157
X.	CLEVER NOVELS	169
XI.	1855	183
XII.	LOW TASTES	197
XIII.	LOOKING BACK	211

JAMES ELROY FLECKER

B

JAMES ELROY FLECKER

I

Of the many young poets who died or were killed during the European War, none perhaps has proved a greater loss to English letters than James Elroy Flecker. By his death in Switzerland of consumption at the age of thirty England was deprived of a poet who loved her passionately, whose work will endure long into the days of peace, whose reputation is likely to go on increasing, rather than to wane. At present his poetry is still, I think, not as familiar as it deserves to be, though the number of his admirers is steadily growing both in England and in America. Flecker was never the idol of any particular set during his lifetime, and since his death very little has been written about his personality as it appeared to those who knew him well. The memories of one who valued his friendship and was closely associated with him during his literary life may thus be not unworthy of record.

My first clear recollection of James Flecker is

of an evening spent with him in a Bloomsbury lodging-house, in the early summer of 1907. He had not long come down from Oxford, and had recently, I think, been schoolmastering in Hampstead.

The house, which was in Torrington Square, on the left-hand side as you walked towards the Irvingite Church, seemed dark and half-deserted on my arrival, and its cavernous hall was illuminated only by one flickering gas-jet, half-way up the stairs. Flecker's sitting-room was at the back, on the second floor, and on the night of my visit it was in an extraordinary state of chaos, reminding one of nothing so much as the inner parlour of a second-hand bookseller's shop. Books and papers lay about everywhere, heaped together in hopeless confusion. A wave of paper-covered volumes seemed to have broken over the table and spent itself on the floor. More piles of books stood in all the corners and on the chimney-piece; the book-cases overflowed. Pictures were stacked against the skirting-board or lay face downwards on the carpet. A typewriter somewhere disentangled itself from amidst piles of manuscript. And jumbled up with French, Spanish and Italian novels, foreign illustrated papers and sumptuous editions of the Greek and Latin poets, were liqueur bottles, glasses, copies of "L'Assiette au Beurre,"

and packets of *caporal* cigarettes. A withering glare of unshaded incandescent gas poured down on all this confusion, in the midst of which—tall and lean, with black hair and heavy eyebrows—stalked the unforgettable figure.

The details of what took place that evening remain with peculiar distinctness in my memory, though it was not, of course, my first meeting with Flecker. This must have been in a drawing-room in Chelsea, for I did not know him as an undergraduate except by repute. His fame at Oxford for the kind of brilliance then in vogue was astonishing, his "japes" were repeated everywhere, and long before I met him I had heard so much about his genius that I was filled with suspicions, determined at all costs not to be unduly impressed! (In those days I had my own gods and was prepared to find other people's inferior.)

Any prejudices with which I may have arrived at Flecker's rooms were, however, very soon dispersed. Never shall I forget the way he talked! The window of the room was wide open at the bottom, framing a square of dark blue night; and through it, as an undertone to his conversation, came the faint, thrilling roar of London. He was tremendously excited—in an extraordinary mood of elation. He was excited about his first book of poems, which was shortly to be published by Mr.

Elkin Mathews, excited about his novel, *The King of Alsander*, of which the opening chapters had just been typed; and, above all, excited (so it seemed) by the sheer joy of being alive, of having the world in front of him. I remember that he read me the two poems, "Ideal" and "The Town without a Market," which I fancy he had just completed; and I can hear him now repeating the lines—

> "When all my gentle friends had gone
> I wandered in the night alone:
> Beneath the green electric glare
> I saw men pass with hearts of stone;
> Yet still I heard them everywhere,
> Those golden voices of the air:
> 'Friend, we will go to hell with thee.' . . ."

in his gentle, rather high-pitched, enthusiastic voice, with its latent suggestion of melancholy. And after this he read the first two chapters of *The King of Alsander*, and never before, I thought, had work of such epoch-making brilliance been written. (Alas, when I read the poor old "King" in his entirety, seven years later, it was a blow to find how Time had robbed him of his glamour.) Then he talked of his approaching visit to France, with a friend in the Foreign Office. They were off to plunge into some kind of rising among the *vignerons* of the Bordeaux district, where at that time Catholicism was in conflict with the Republic.

Flecker produced the *rigolo* which he was taking with him; its barrel glinted in the gaslight. Somehow he made the adventure of being *young* almost unimaginably thrilling. At that time I was an ardent Francophile, and Flecker seemed to have done all the things which I (at twenty) was pining to do myself. It appeared that he knew Paris almost as well as London; had been to all the cabarets of Montmartre and the Latin quarter; was familiar with Steinlen's work (not so hackneyed in those far-off days), of which he had many reproductions; and could hum all the latest songs of Bruant, Lucien Boyer or Marinier.

Flecker was essentially of the fine flower of the English Public School and University system; he was entirely absorbed in his art and in the loveliness of a world seen through the eyes of a scholar and a poet. Never before or since have I encountered any one with such a rapturous, with such an intoxicating joy of living. Our talk soon came back to poetry, to his own poems; and as I listened, to be a poet seemed the most wonderful thing in a world full of the maddest, most delicious possibilities. . . .

That was one aspect of Flecker; there was another. Behind his delight in life could be detected, even then, an under-note of sadness. When he wrote of himself as " the lean and swarthy poet

of despair" it was probably a joke—it was still the fashion to be despairing in those days—but, like most jokes worth making, there was a flavour of truth in it. It is difficult to avoid the thought that some of the extraordinary rapture with which he looked on the world was due to a premonition that he was not long to inhabit it, that his time for enjoyment was too short to allow him a moment to waste. Traces of this under-note are to be found in the poem called "No Coward's Song"; and again in the lines called "Prayer," which were written, I think, in 1907—

"Let me not know, except from printed page,
The pain of bitter love, of baffled pride,
Or sickness shadowing with a long presage.

Let me not know, since happy some have died
Quickly in youth or quietly in age,
How faint, how loud the bravest hearts have cried."

Flecker and I met very frequently, after the evening in Torrington Square, in the flat of a friend in South London. On these occasions he was nearly always surrounded by people who knew him better than I did, and my impressions are now a little blurred. But I retain a glimpse of him sitting at the piano, dressed up in a Japanese kimono, smiling his pleasant, rather sardonic smile and thumping out the tune of "La branche de Lilas" or "Navaho," while the rest of us shouted

the choruses. And I remember many amusing contests of wit, in almost all of which Flecker came off best. Not quite in all, however, for I was present at his Waterloo. The cult of the Suburban Music-hall was just beginning in those days, in "interior" circles, and it was a little Cockney dancer called Gertie who, on an historic evening—our hostess shamelessly abetting her—succeeded in worsting him. Gertie must have learnt her back-chat in the New Cut, or else have taken lessons from a bus-conductor. Never before have I listened to such a torrent of droll invective as she poured out on the poet's (for once) defenceless head! Flecker's wit on that occasion was certainly no match for Gertie's humour; though I think this was the only time I ever knew him to be verbally at a disadvantage.

The incident which really formed the beginning of my more intimate acquaintance with Flecker is one which reveals him so clearly that I must relate it, though it be at my own expense. When his first volume of poems, *The Bridge of Fire*, was published, I expected something prodigious, and got Lord Alfred Douglas to let me have it to review for *The Academy*. Alas, the book did not at all come up to the expectations I had formed, and in my disappointment I felt constrained to administer a sincere, if rather jejune, "slating." One took

oneself with tremendous solemnity in those days, and all our little circle was scandalised. Every one, indeed, was extremely angry with me—except Flecker. For all I know he may have been amused and interested to hear one note of criticism, however inept, amid a chorus of equally inept praise. In any case he contented himself with addressing a rejoinder to *The Academy*, which was published the week after my notice—a rejoinder of much skill and the most perfect good temper. And when, some time later, I myself commenced author with a pamphlet of youthful verses, he heaped coals of fire on my head by taking the trouble to review it in a Cambridge paper, in terms of the greatest generosity.

Our connection of author and publisher, which was to last until his death, began when, in 1910, I started a monthly magazine of earnest literary aspirations. In the first number of this periodical Flecker's most intimate Oxford friend had let me print a poem called "The Visit"; and Flecker himself became a fairly frequent contributor. The poems called "In Memoriam," "Pillage," and "The War Song of the Saracens" first appeared in its pages, and one or two others which I think have not been reprinted. About this time I induced the firm which owned the magazine to issue a volume of Flecker's verses, to which he gave

the title *Thirty-six Poems*. But the concern having unfortunately more good intent than capital or business management, the volume did not prosper, and on the demise of the magazine, after a year's unavailing struggle for existence, the sheets of Flecker's book were transferred to Messrs. J. M. Dent & Sons., Ltd. Messrs. Dent reissued the book in 1911 with six additional pieces, under the more familiar title, *Forty-two Poems*.

For the next two years I heard but little of Flecker. He left England to take up a Consular appointment, and was stationed first at Constantinople, then at Smyrna, and finally at Beirut. In 1911 he travelled in Greece, and it was at Athens that he married the Greek lady, Mdlle. Hellé Skiadaressi, who was to prove to him so true a companion and friend, and whose devotion did so much to prolong his life.

It was not until early in 1913 that I got into touch with him again. I had at that time become associated with the firm of Max Goschen, which had just started business. (This firm, owing to the regretted death of its proprietor, who was killed in France in the early days of the war, no longer exists.) Flecker wrote to me from Beirut in February 1913, mentioning that he had a new book of verse nearly ready and lamenting the poor sales of his *Forty-two Poems*.

By now—and, indeed, ever since the days of *The Academy* review—my belief in Flecker was unshakable, and I knew that sooner or later he was bound to come into his own. I was delighted when he accepted our offer for his new book, which was made before we had seen any of the MS., and I wrote to promise that I personally would do all I possibly could to push the sales. It was to this end, with a view to "stirring up the pond" and goading the reviewers into animation, that I urged him to write the now famous "Preface," and to make it fiercely controversial.

The first of the letters from Flecker which I have been able to find among my papers is dated May 10, and came from Beirut.

Already his illness was upon him, and there is no doubt that the task of getting *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* into its final shape (after very heavy and painstaking alterations) exhausted all his strength.

"I am very ill again," he writes, "and probably shall come to England. Can't work at much and hardly at this letter. The Preface was an awful strain."

He did not, of course, return to England (which he was never to see again), but went instead to

Switzerland. His next letter, dated June 5, came from Leysin-sur-Aigle—

"Thank the Lord this place is curing me. The journey nearly killed me. There is nothing terribly wrong—but I shall take a month or two to recover, and always have to live with precaution. Meantime many thanks for your kind letter. Herewith I have sent the proofs complete. Please look over the revise—or 'Taoping' in its new version will come out in a hash.

"Left out first page of Preface as being rather babyish. You might let me know what you think of the book—and especially of my alterations to 'Gates of Damascus' and 'Taoping.' I am immensely proud of it. I've turfed out all the rot. It seems to me—and to the few critics who have seen it—to be miles ahead of the *Forty-two*. If the publisher wants to puff me he can safely say that the Oriental Poems are unique in English.

"I do wish one could have a few de luxe copies (as they do in France) on fine paper with fine binding.

"I have, alas, lost a good deal more than £10 in not having time to get all the poems into mags. In particular 'Oak and Olive' was being kept by the *Fortnightly*, and they sent it back because they had no time to publish it by June. But never mind, let's out with the book at once!

"I have some glorious translations from Paul Fort and other modern Frenchmen, but I preferred

to keep *The Golden Journey* original from beginning to end. . . ."

I heard again from him a week later, still from Leysin—a long and very lucid business letter, chiefly about *The King of Alsander* and the behaviour of another publisher who, after accepting the book and getting Flecker to alter it two or three times, eventually refused to bring it out on the ground that he had "lost interest." There can be no point in recalling such a controversy now; and it is only fair to the publisher in question to assume that there were two sides to the dispute. Flecker continues thus about the book—

"The novel, originally a very poor production, is now a very jolly and fantastic work. Whether it will sell or not I don't believe a publisher in the world could say. It may take or it mayn't. I'll send it to you if you like. But—

"(*a*) Messrs. Goschen may well fight shy of a book which another publisher has broken his contract to evade publishing.

"(*b*) It might be better to get compensation before I get another publisher. Yet it might again be better the other way."

"Messrs. Goschen," needless to say, were quite prepared to publish anything which Flecker chose to send them. I must, however, confess that

when the MS. of *The King of Alsander* reached me my heart sank a little, in spite of all the pleasant memories which the opening chapters revived. I did not think the book had much chance of selling, or, indeed, that it particularly deserved to sell, and I wrote to Flecker explaining my reasons for this opinion.

His reply is dated June 21—

"My dear Goldring,

"Thanks so much for writing promptly and at such length. The novel is a most patchy affair—I quite agree with you. I am not a novelist because I don't really think novels worth writing—at the bottom of my heart. Yet I did not burn the old *King of Alsander*—it is, by God, seven years since I lost the first three chapters of it on the way to Paris with —— and —— of your acquaintance—because it has, with all its faults, some passages which I think rather jolly, and because even if a bit laboured in parts, it is such a joyously silly performance.

"I have written to Goschens accepting their offer.

"A drama is a thing, now, that is worth writing. I have had most encouraging letters about my work in that direction from ——, but I hope that Granville Barker and no other will take up *Hassan*, my Oriental play. It may interest you to know that Yasmin is out of my play—was written for it—and also *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*

is nothing but the final scene. I admit a little verse into my play here and there.

"Read the poem called 'The Golden Journey' and consider the 'Pilgrim with the beautiful voice' to be Hassan, the hero of a whole drama, and think what it would sound like actually on the stage, with Granville Barker scenery—moonlight.

"More alive to-day. I hope the novel may succeed after all. It is pleasant of you to be so prompt. The misery of literary people! *The Spectator* and *The Nation* will return or accept pretty quick. The '——' is hopeless, utterly. '——' are, I think, mad. Good God, if one ran the rottenest of little Vice-Consulates in the way the '——' is run, there'd be a row in a month!

"Ever yours thankfully,

"J. E. Flecker.

"P.S.—(1) Should much like to read your novel; didn't know you'd written one.

"(2) What do you think—if by any chance *The Golden Journey* gets known—of having the Oriental poems (plus 'Saracens' and 'Ballad of Iskander' from 42) illustrated by Syme for a Xmas volume?

"(3) Shan't anthologise after what you told me. Thanks."

I had one more letter from him from Leysin

(dated June 30, 1913) in which the following interesting passage occurs—

"'In Phaæcia' (the rottenest poem in the book) should appear in *Everyman* and 'Taoping' in *The Spectator* (eh, what? the citadel of respectability stormed!) this week. Did you see Solomon Eagle's extremely amusing jibe at me in *The New Statesman?* Who is he? Am getting fatter and stronger. I hope to be in England producing my play this autumn. Why does no one translate great French books like Jules Renard's *Lanterne Sourde* or Claude Farrère's marvellous *Battaille?*"

The Golden Journey to Samarkand was issued in the early part of July, and was a success almost from the first. About this time Flecker moved from Leysin to Montana, and the next letter from him which I have unearthed came from there, dated August 31—

"I have been a most shameful time answering your delightful and enthusiastic letter of congratulation, for which I thank you most heartily. The reviews—especially *The Times* and *The Morning Post*—have been good enough for Shakespeare: I do hope they will even be enough to sell a few copies of the book; I should hate Goschens to be badly had by the transaction.

"I have been bothered lately trying to find a new place to live in, and only got here after a

frightful lot of bother. I am pretty sick of life. I've finished my play, but I don't suppose it will ever be played. . . ."

This letter also contained one of the suggestions for books in which he was so fertile—

"I shall write a book one day," he says, "on how to spend money in a jolly way, for men of moderate income (£500–£1500 a year). Tell the ——'s they ought to travel. The book will sell by the hundred thousand million on the railway bookstalls."

In another letter he gives us a glimpse of his life at Montana—

"There is perpetual sunshine here and perpetual leisure. Otherwise there's no particular reason for my continued existence. I get neither better nor worse, and wait all day for news of *Hassan*."

From this time onwards, perhaps inspired by the magnificent success of *The Golden Journey*, he sent me a stream of projects for books, none of which he was ever destined to carry out. The only one which he seems seriously to have started, is a translation of Virgil's *Æneid*, VI, of which, in a letter dated "Sunday," he writes as follows—

"My next book is half written. It is, I'm afraid, rather horrifying. This is the title—

AN INTERPRETATION

IN BLANK VERSE

OF

VIRGIL, *ÆNEID*, VI,

based on the poetic Value of the Sounds,
together with the Latin text
and ten Prefaces,

by

JAMES ELROY FLECKER

120 pp. Wide margins. Paper, 3*s.* 6*d.*? Ready in February.

Seriously this is exactly the title I intend to give the book, with which I am well advanced already. The book is simply an attempt to do a translation of Virgil as satisfactory as Fitzgerald's 'Omar'—a translation which will utterly eclipse the very numerous and very feeble attempts hitherto existing.

"The ten Prefaces will be as combative as Bernard Shaw's, and occupy some forty pages. They will be on the translation of sound, on blank verse, on Hell literature, on preceding translations of Virgil, on Modern Scholarship, on the Modern Spirit, etc., etc., and should irritate every one as effectually as my Preface to *Samarkand*."

Here is yet another project, contained in an undated letter—

"I have long had a scheme for bringing out an Anthology of French verse. Poets of To-day and Yesterday—from after Hugo and Musset, and not including them, to the present day. Each poet would be preceded by a short notice.

"In the idea of the short notice and in the period traversed the book would thus resemble Walch's great three-volume work—but in no other way.

"(1) There would be a larger and very different choice of the more important people and none of the pages of dreary rot by the great unknown.

"(2) The criticisms at the beginning would be original and not borrowed.

"(3) The whole book would not be more than one volume."

And here is a third suggested volume, some materials for which may perhaps have been found among the papers which he left—

"I *have*, it is true, a vague scheme for a book. I have quaint ideas on most things—literature, of course, but also current politics—and a million other things. I find that exile makes it useless trying to work these ideas up into articles, and also that if I do turn them into articles all my dear ideas become heavy and dull. I don't, for instance, a bit

want to write a long review on H. G. Wells. But I do want to say and state my opinion for posterity that his latest work is pompous drivel, and that *Mr. Polly* is one of the best things ever written in any language.

" I might call the book ' Poet's Porridge ' and should write it very quickly. Under headings Literature, Politics, etc., it would consist of little brief paragraphs of rather pithy comment. You may not know that I am a violent Philhellene: that will come in also. (I am writing a magnificent coronation ode for King Constantine.)

" Just mention the idea to Goschens, will you? Then if they'd like to see a bit, I'll scrape together a few pages and send them as a specimen. There is something novel about a poet damning round on current events: only, of course, I ought to be better known than I am to get a hearing."

His last letter to me from Montana is undated, like the others, but since it appears to have been written after the issue of *The King of Alsander*, it was probably sent early in 1914—

" You know my play *Hassan* is going to be played in London this autumn if all goes well; I've got an excellent collaborator. Goschens shall print it—but only after it's played, and that's a long way off yet.

" Otherwise I try to revise another older play of mine, and when not sufficiently inspired for that

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I do the Virgil, which Gilbert Murray has pronounced to be the best translation of him in English.

"I can't work much, and haven't at present any original ideas in my head. I'm only just now managing to get up to lunch after three months' illness. Hope to go to Locarno soon—will send you address if I move. As for poems I've only written four since *Samarkand*, and they be small ones. . . .

"I owe you many thanks for having introduced me to Goschens. They are certainly advertising excellently. I shall be not only disappointed, but astonished if *The King of Alsander* don't move. . . .

"That '——' *do* irritate me (I don't refer to your excellent review) with its childish anti-God rubbish—(we're about two hundred years ahead of these asses on the Continent, in the middle of a Catholic reaction, and leave that sort of vulgarity to the plebs)—and its ridiculous abuse of Tennyson and other Victorians. Do they really imagine —— writes as well as Tennyson or Kipling? It's astonishing!

"Do write again. Do you ever see ——? If so, remember me fondly."

The last three of his letters which I have preserved were sent from Davos Platz, and make unutterably sad reading. In the first of them he writes, "I'm so damned ill I'm almost in despair," and speaks of his disappointment at having lost the Polignac prize, recording the fact that Professor

Gilbert Murray and Mr. W. B. Yeats voted for him. The second is dated June 1—

"My dear Goldring,

"(1) Do send me any news there is going.

"(2) No, my dear fellow, *don't* ask me if I can write a book about Greece—descriptive tour. I can only preserve the rotten remnants of my life by lying in bed here for years—in the ugliest hole God ever created.

"(3) But I do intend to publish my great ode to Greece separately with a forty-page preface of a most violent kind, full of abuse and invective of pro-Turks, pro-Bulgars, the Liberal Press, with history of the Eastern question. I should much value an assurance that Goschens would take this; it might create a bit of a stir.

"(4) I'm still waiting to hear from Oxford about my Virgil, and haven't done a line more to it, or, indeed, to anything for months. . . . I want to write a play on *Judith*, and I ought to revise my *Don Juan*, and I've got to work *Hassan* with my collaborator. And day after day I do nothing. . . .

"Ever yours,

"James Elroy Flecker.

"I'd give all my poems to be a healthy navvy."

The last letter is dated October 12, 1914—

"My dear Goldring,

"I should much like to hear from you. . . . We've got a flat, and I amuse myself by lying in

bed all day. I can write only a *very* little in the morning; have pupped a War poem and some prose. Could we send a dozen of our novels to the navy? the officers it seems have only too much time for reading! Do give me news of you. . ."

He died on January 3, 1915.

II

Perhaps in no other art are the fashions more capricious than in that of poetry, and the statement may be hazarded that whenever a poet finds himself on the crest of fashion's wave his reputation is usually in peril. There seem to be two ways for a poet to become fashionable in England. The first is for him to be immensely admired by a clique of reviewers and their friends, the *literati*, none of whom, of course, buy his books; the other—the more immediately profitable, the more ultimately disastrous way—is for him to be "raved about" by cultured young women in elegant London drawing-rooms. But either way is, as often as not, a short cut to oblivion. Flecker was lucky in escaping them both. In his lifetime he was never fashionable, and few things were more impressive about him than his aloofness. He was generously treated by his reviewers (in spite of his amusing strictures on them), but never boomed by any one

circle of critics. After his Oxford days he was never in a "set." The people who admired him were scattered, widely divergent types, mostly unknown to one another. He was very little known, I think, to his brother poets, certainly to the more "advanced" section, several of whom I have heard remark at different times: "Who *is* Flecker? Is he any good?" Flecker followed his own path, looking neither to the right nor to the left, and apparently but little influenced by any of his contemporaries. Until, with the approach of death, his powers began to fail him, his literary record is one of unbroken progress.

Flecker's entire output of verse and prose during his lifetime, not counting unpublished work and contributions to periodicals, was limited to seven or eight small volumes, one of which, his admirable *Scholar's Italian Book*, is clearly in a class by itself. He made two attempts at prose fiction, an amusing undergraduate effort called *The Last Generation*, and his solitary novel, *The King of Alsander*. This last has always seemed to me an unsatisfactory and unequal performance. It has flashes of wit here and there, a few good passages of rather mannered prose, and many slabs of "fine writing." But as a *jeu d'esprit* it is distinctly heavy and overweighted; and the high spirits are only intermittent. The majority of the reviewers praised the book

immoderately on its appearance, but I don't think Flecker himself was much impressed by their eulogies.

Within its narrow compass, the little-known "Dialogue on Education" called *The Grecians* is perhaps the most perfect of Flecker's prose works. I do not think any one who has not read this book can get a proper appreciation of his mind and outlook, for of all his work it is, in some ways, the most intimately self-revealing. The "Dialogue" enshrines the conversation of two schoolmasters—Hofman, the scientist, and Edwinson, the classic—who, while on a visit to Bologna, fall in with a beautiful youth and join with him in a discussion on educational reform. Each gives his view of the questions at issue, until finally the beautiful youth sums up the argument and launches forth into a dissertation on the ideal school. "Keeping clear before me all the danger I run of turning my pupils into dilettanti, I am going to teach them to be as far as possible universal in their comprehensions and admiration of the mysteries and beauties of life. Our Grecians, when they leave us, will have seen, as it were, from a height suddenly, the whole world of knowledge stretching out in rich plains and untraversed seas."

The picture is delightful; but one cannot have things both ways, I suppose, and certain doubts

inevitably drift into one's mind. With their eyes dazzled by this radiant vision of "Knowledge" how should the little Grecians learn to pursue Understanding, that elusive shadow? But the passage reveals Flecker to us, reveals him in a characteristic and very attractive light. He himself was a rare scholar, not so much in regard to his actual attainments (though they were considerable) as from the fact that his scholarship really enriched him, coloured his whole outlook, made the world a lovelier place for him. His mind was so steeped in the atmosphere of the classic poets that he saw life and all the world as it were through rose-tinted spectacles. Out of the loveliness which met his gaze he has re-created for us in his poetry a fairyland in which it is an enchantment to wander. Yet it must be admitted that these spectacles to some extent restricted his vision and limited its range: his fairyland has walls. This perhaps explains why his poetry is at its best when he deals with subjects which are obviously "poetic." His was never the genius to find poetry in the raw material of ordinary existence, as, for example, is the way with Mr. D. H. Lawrence. Even when he writes of London his hand is unsteady; and of all his poems the "Ballad of Camden Town" is the only one which is unconsciously absurd. "The Burial in England," the

last great poem which he wrote, and a fine piece of work in the "big bow-wow" style, is another illustration of this point. The European War stirred Flecker deeply, and though he planned and carried through a grandiose war poem, he did not treat his theme with any real conviction. "The Burial in England" is full of ingenious epithets, rich in poetic "ornament," and so wonderful and complicated in its technique that a superficial reader might easily mistake it for a masterpiece. But once strip it of its jewelled phrases, of its beauties of craftsmanship, and it will appear as devoid of true inspiration and originality of thought as the average leading article.

As a critic, Flecker was distinguished by a great capacity for enthusiastic appreciation—a quality far too rare and valuable to be despised. Almost any one can pick holes in another's work: it requires a finer sensibility to appreciate and reveal excellence. Unfortunately his enthusiasms, if infectious, were apt to carry him off his feet, apt to lead him into extravagant praise of writers whom he admired, and extravagant denunciation of writers whom he didn't admire. One got the impression that for him the poets were divided into those who were "magnificent" and those who wrote "God-forsaken muck." But his preferences were founded in the main on knowledge and sound judgment.

He was innocent of literary snobbishness; he was not ashamed of admiring Tennyson, and even Kipling; he never descended to the fashionable vulgarity of abusing the Victorians.

Flecker's first volume of verse, *The Bridge of Fire*, though it contains indications of his future powers, still seems to me to have in it much that is poor or merely imitative, and a few pieces, like the dismally unfunny "Ballad of Hampstead Heath," which are frankly bad. Most of the best poems in this book were much worked over—not always with happy results—before they reappeared in the later volume. The beautiful "Tenebris Interlucentem" was vastly improved, almost re-created, in its later version; but some of the alterations to other pieces are not so successful. In the little poem called "We that were Friends," for example, he has made a change in the first verse without improving it, while leaving in the second the unfortunate line, "Whom dreams delight and passions *please*." (Whatever passions may do it is difficult to think of them as "pleasing" anybody—except perhaps a fish, to whom a passion might be a "pleasing" surprise.) Another alteration which some of those who possess *The Bridge of Fire* will regret, is in the last verse of the poem called "The Ballad of the Student in the South." The first line of this verse originally ran: "We're

of the people, you and I." In the version contained in the *Collected Poems* this has been changed to, "For we are simple, you and I"—a much weaker and more "literary" way of saying the same thing.

It was with his *Forty-two Poems* that Flecker definitely established his position among the poets of his time. Many of us will not forget the excitement of first reading that marvellous "Ballad of Iskander"; and in such poems as "The Masque of the Magi," and "Joseph and Mary" he showed the same clearness of outline and almost pre-Raphaelite vividness of colour which distinguish *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*. Almost all the finest of Flecker's poetry is to be found in the *Forty-two Poems* and in *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*. Of the later work included in the *Collected Poems* there are not perhaps more than three pieces which are equal to the best which these volumes contain. These three, however, are of particular interest. I think no other poem of Flecker's is quite so moving as the exquisite piece called "Stillness," with its wonderful last verse—

"Then twittering out in the night my thought-birds flee,
I am emptied of all my dreams:
I only hear Earth turning, only see
Ether's long bankless streams,
And only know I should drown if you laid not your hand on me."

This poem seems almost to make clear that had Flecker lived he would ultimately have shed his Parnassian theory, and allowed himself, more often, to be subjective. Among all his poems it seems to me to be in a place by itself. Of the other pieces issued for the first time in book form in the *Collected Poems*, "The Old Ships" and "The Pensive Prisoner," with its strange, haunting music, are perhaps the most beautiful. But apart from these three poems, the most important of the *Collected Poems* are those which were originally published under the title of *The Golden Journey to Samarkand*. It was not until Flecker went to the Levant, and found in travel in Turkey and Greece and among the islands of the Ægean the greatest inspiration of his life, that he really came into his own. *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* is the book of his maturity, in which all his finest poetic qualities are displayed to the full, all his weaknesses expunged. Considered as a book, it marks as great an advance on *Forty-two Poems* as did the *Forty-two Poems* on *The Bridge of Fire*. Not only is his own description of the Oriental poems as being "unique in English" fully justified, but few poems in our literature show a more passionate love of England than those which he wrote in Syria and in Greece. What Englishman can read the opening lines of "Brumana," for example, and remain unthrilled?

"Oh shall I never never be home again?
Meadows of England shining in the rain
Spread wide your daisied lawns: your ramparts green
With briar fortify, with blossom screen
Till my far morning—and O streams that slow
And pure and deep through plains and playlands go,
For me your love and all your kingcups store,
And—dark militia of the southern shore,
Old fragrant friends—preserve me the last lines
Of that long saga which you sung me, pines,
When, lonely boy, beneath the chosen tree
I listened, with my eyes upon the sea."

It was fortunate for Flecker that the kind of poetry which by temperament, by intellectual equipment and by the circumstances of his birth and upbringing he was most capable of writing seems to have been just the kind which he most wanted to write. In this respect his career, short as it was, was singularly happy. He followed no literary wild-goose chase. He was not, apparently, dissatisfied with his manner, only with his workmanship, which never satisfied him. At least a part of his genius seems to have lain in a realisation of his exact capacities. He seldom gropes after things which are too high for him. I think it can nowhere be said of him that he "wrought better than he knew"; and, to judge from his constant emendations, he seems to have had an almost exaggerated distrust of what Mr. Arthur Symons has somewhere called "the plenary

inspiration of first thoughts." In some ways he was more typically a French than an English poet, and his description of the Parnassians in the Preface to *The Golden Journey to Samarkand* applies to himself almost exactly. Like them he loathed romantic egoism and aimed at " a beauty somewhat statuesque "; like them he had a fine sense of language, using words and epithets with the nicest scholarship and taste; and, again, like them he derived his inspiration from the classics, from history, from mythology, from beautiful names, from places, and, indeed, from anything rather than from life. It was hardly ever life—either in its " ordinariness " or in its strangeness—which Flecker succeeded in transmuting into poetry. His work is an escape from life, rather than an interpretation of it. And here and there, in his less-inspired moments, one feels that it is only its technical brilliance which saves it from having too limiting a flavour of " Oxford College." His poetry is usually rather cold, and it cannot be claimed for Flecker that he was remarkable for originality of thought. His emotional range is limited, and his greatest strength lies in his power to create pictures compact, clear in outline, and rich in colour, and in the haunting music of which he had the secret. " Emaux et Camées " would not have made a bad alternative title for his

collected work; and there are times when he strikes one as being an artificer with imagination, or rather when his art seems to resemble that of the jeweller or worker in precious metals. His poems, although never rising to the highest imaginative level, are yet hammered and worked till they attain a hard, indestructible perfection. It is difficult to believe that verse of such a character will be quickly forgotten, for it seems to possess all the qualities necessary for permanence.

Flecker's poetry depends on nothing transitory for its interest; it contains no message to grow stale; and the extraordinary amount of work put into his verses gives them an impressive solidity. It must always be remembered of Flecker that in an age of anarchy in verse he took the trouble to become a master of technique; in an age of formlessness he upheld the finest traditions of form. What was beautiful two thousand years ago is beautiful still; and, as Flecker has told us himself, it was with the single object of creating beauty that his poems were written. Who can read them and imagine for a moment that he failed in his object? One cannot think that the glowing visions which his poems bring before the mind will prove any less enchanting to readers in the centuries to come than they are to-day. One cannot believe that his lines "To a Poet a Thousand Years Hence"

will fail to carry their message through the ages to some craftsman as conscientious as himself—

"O friend unseen, unborn, unknown,
Student of our sweet English tongue,
Read out my words at night, alone:
I was a poet, I was young.

Since I can never see your face,
And never shake you by the hand,
I send my soul through time and space,
To greet you. You will understand."

THREE GEORGIAN NOVELISTS

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I. Compton Mackenzie

If the ordinary circulating library subscriber were asked for the names of the three English novelists still under forty who have most definitely "arrived," ten to one he (or she) would mention Mr. Compton Mackenzie, Mr. Hugh Walpole and Mr. Gilbert Cannan. The success of this triumvirate when—their apprenticeship served—they assembled under the banner of Mr. Martin Secker to make their respective bids for fame, was immediate, and in some ways perhaps unprecedented. For theirs was not merely a success of vulgar popularity, it was a *succès d'estime* as well. Novel readers who borrowed the works of these writers from their libraries felt that they were not quite as other novel readers, that they were displaying *kultur*. And, thanks either to their eminent social qualifications, to the skill and tact of their *impresario*, or to their own undoubted talents, these three pretty men very soon came to stand for the "younger generation" whenever the "older generation" wished to

patronise their juniors or to pontificate about them. Even Mr. Henry James spun a stately web of words around them in *The Times Literary Supplement.* It was not necessary to read what he had written to feel that since he had actually examined and discussed their works they must be of astounding merit. Where the high, august ones had pronounced, it was not for the mere reviewers to do anything but echo and enlarge. Thus, like a snowball, the prestige of these three novelists increased from year to year until the disruptive influence of the War intervened to break the spell and to impose a reconsideration of every opinion, whether æsthetic or political, which we entertained before its outbreak. The War has hung up all literary careers, those of the successful as well as those of the unknown, and it is hard to believe that any novelist can have emerged from it with his reputation unaltered.

Of the three writers here grouped together, the one who has been hitherto the most successful has perhaps suffered most in critical esteem. Mr. Mackenzie has emerged from the War an established "best-seller"; as a serious novelist he seems to have resigned business. The chief deficiencies from which Mr. Mackenzie's earlier novels suffered were in fire, passion, spontaneity. The War may have provided him with vivid copy, which he will, no doubt,

use with his accustomed skill; but to judge from his latest books it is hard to believe that it has in any way affected the springs of his being, or given his work a fresh orientation. Each new book which comes from his pen seems frothier than the last, though as he becomes less ambitious he certainly grows more readable. Perhaps it is that he has come to realise his own limitations, to realise that his supreme gift is for the lightest kind of entertainment.

In spite of the attempt made by the circulating libraries to ban *Sinister Street* on the ground of immorality, Mr. Mackenzie had come, by August 1914, to be " the dear Dean's " favourite novelist. " The Dean " (and he may be taken as typical of the intellectual outlook of a large section of the English upper-middle class) considered that Mr. Mackenzie's highly-coloured photographs of Leicester Square were real *tranches de vie*—horrible, pitiful, but oh, so true! For " the Dean " and his like, the fact that Mr. Mackenzie, when at Oxford, belonged clearly to a good set in a good college, was of great importance. Mr. Mackenzie's Oxford career has, indeed, been invaluable to him—up to a point —in his career as a novelist. He was a dazzling figure in the days when he used to walk hatless down the Corn—the cynosure of every eye—with a romantic cloak over his shoulder, his hair brushed

back in Byronic disorder, and the blue cover of *The Oxford Point of View* just visible under his arm. His reputation in that University circle which forms such an influential part of literary London, was made even before he published his first book, and proved sufficiently robust to stand that shock. For thin as the sheaf of " early poems " with which most writers begin their literary lives usually is, the paper-bound volume of *Poems* with which Mr. Mackenzie commenced author, with Mr. Blackwell's aid, was emptier than anything of the kind which I can recall. Early poems, as a rule, at least reveal the main tendencies of the author's mind, its texture, its possibilities. Mr. Mackenzie's were a casket of most artistic design, filled with nothing save the dust of libraries. But any ground he may have lost by his poems was soon regained on the publication of *The Passionate Elopement*. Few first novels have been more brilliantly launched or more abundantly advertised than this. It was " costume drama," intentionally artificial, with no serious attempt at psychology or characterisation; but it was extremely well done, and it proved that Mr. Mackenzie was, at all events, capable of a job of work, and had no intention of becoming a mere dilettante. This capacity for work was shown in a still more striking way in *Carnival*, Mr. Mackenzie's first

effort at depicting the life of his own time. It was evident at once that the setting of the story had been studied with minute care. The same indefatigable accumulation of detail which characterises Mr. Arnold Bennett's long novels about his native Five Towns was here applied to subjects selected deliberately for their romantic interest. No one would choose to read about the Five Towns if Mr. Bennett did not force him to do so by appealing to the public's love of literary photography. Mr. Mackenzie adopted the photographic method, but, instead of applying it to a drab section of provincial life, he applied it to the kind of life most likely to interest the largest number of people. He was thus to some extent the forerunner of the cinema. He brought the more highly coloured portions of the world before his reader's eyes; and he eschewed " drabness " like the plague. His mean streets, his low life had the specious glamour of what is metropolitan, and were relieved with bright splashes of garish illumination from Leicester Square and with the rich greens and greys of the Cornish landscape.

Considered purely as a piece of literary photography, *Carnival* showed that already Mr. Mackenzie had little to learn about cameras. When he described a room he might have been actually sitting in it, in such detail were its contents

recorded; when he wrote of the appearance of a street, or of the outside of a house, the amazed reader felt that that street or that house must actually have been before his eyes at the time. His descriptions of the outward and physical characteristics of his human puppets were no less complete than his descriptions of their environment. To the hearts of many of his struggling fellow-craftsmen *Carnival* simply struck consternation. Here was a newcomer who was prepared to take unheard-of pains. The public would be sure to gobble up his work, and would expect the same kind of thing in all the other novels they read. Thus the whole wretched job of turning out commercial fiction would be made more difficult. Note-books were brought out, shirt-cuffs were pulled down, and those writers who were too jaded to set their imaginations in motion started busily to make elaborate notes, in the hope of keeping up.

The success which followed the publication of *Carnival*, in spite of the book's "inward and spiritual" emptiness, was certainly deserved, and Mr. Mackenzie's fellow-novelists will be the first to admit that the book is in many ways an astonishing performance. Colour is piled on with a lavish hand, and so long as the author is describing the exteriors of places and of people, or recording conversations with a gramophone's fidelity, he is

admirable. It is only when the story cannot move ahead without the exercise by the author of his imagination, when the characters are forced to reveal their very essence, when the appeal is not to the eye or to the brain, but to the centres of emotion, that he breaks down. For Mr. Mackenzie's methods of expressing any kind of human feeling are of the theatre, theatrical. The *dénouement* of *Carnival*, and several of the more important situations in the book, leave the critical reader sceptical and unconvinced at the very moment when the story demands that he should be most moved. The defect of Mr. Mackenzie's qualities is that he is so absorbed in giving a vivid presentation of his characters *from the outside*, that he usually omits to explore their minds and hearts and motives. When he does make an attempt to get below the surface, his psychology is all at sea, except when he is dealing with his favourite type of empty Oxford prig who is all surface, and is, indeed, at best only a human being in embryo. (Perhaps it is that, interposed between Mr. Mackenzie's mind and life in the raw, there is always an impermeable veil of "Oxford College.") The general effect of *Carnival* is, in any case—despite all its skill, vivacity and colour—that of a brilliantly superficial piece of work lacking in sincerity and depth of feeling.

In Mr. Mackenzie's astounding *magnum opus*,

Sinister Street, the good qualities of *Carnival* are brought to their highest conceivable pitch, its deficiencies correspondingly exaggerated. *Sinister Street* has all the subsidiary qualities of a work of genius without the genius. Everything is there—colour, vigour, detail, skill in handling a crowded canvas, capacity to hold attention—everything except those essential qualities of human feeling, insight, intuition, wisdom, imaginative sympathy, and capacity to see people and things in just perspective, without which the most brilliant novel that ever was written is nothing worth. To go from *Sinister Street* to one of Turgenev's short stories, such as *First Love*, or *The Torrents of Spring*, or to a novel like Mr. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, is like passing from an airless theatre—where the eye is dazzled with light and bright colours, and the ear filled with waltz music—into the sparkling air of a winter's night, with no roof to shut one in save the immeasurable expanses of the starry sky. And yet as a "document," as a chapter of the social history of Edwardian England, *Sinister Street* has undoubted importance. It embalms a period of Oxford life which will always be interesting to the student of manners. The prigs whose romantic decadence Mr. Mackenzie described with such affectionate care will explain to the historian of the future much that has

happened during the past six years. (Indeed, if the War has succeeded in blotting out of English life for ever young men of the type of Michael Fane, if it has succeeded in changing the average Englishman's attitude towards this type from admiration into one of contempt, it will not have been fought for nothing.) To re-read this immense chronicle of Michael's schooldays and Oxford days, and of his subsequent patronage of the London underworld, is to see the whole world-struggle in a new light. Perhaps Nature had to devise some means of purging the universe of its living dead, of its elderly schoolboys who refuse to grow to man's stature and yet were never young. Michael Fane, Guy Hazlewood and the others of their circle to whom Mr. Mackenzie introduced us are all of the same type, but Michael easily surpasses them. He is the consummate prig. His jejune sexual self-importance, his snobbishness, his airs of the intellectual coxcomb, his imperviousness to the spiritual side of life, infect nearly all the hundreds and hundreds of pages which the author has devoted to his portrayal. The educational reformer—any kind of reformer—who seeks material for destructive criticism of our Public Schools and Universities, could have no more valuable text-books than Mr. Mackenzie's novels of his middle period. They are veracious chronicles—at least in so far as the

Oxford characters are concerned—and, horrible as it may seem, they do faithfully hold up the mirror to Oxford life before the War. It was just as empty, as pretentious, as unreal, as snobbish and as decadent as Mr. Mackenzie makes out. Its attitude towards "Life," towards the larger world of London, was such as Mr. Mackenzie has described it. And in *Sinister Street* is to be found perhaps one of the most perfect unconscious revelations of a snob which exists in our literature. None of our satirists, not even Thackeray, has achieved what Mr. Mackenzie, in his passion for accuracy, accomplishes apparently by accident. The passage occurs in the second volume of *Sinister Street* in the chapter called "Ostia Ditis." Michael Fane meets in a music-hall a coarse, good-natured individual called Drake, with whom he was at school, and whose family lived at one time next door to the Fanes. They have not met for four years, during which time Drake has gone into the City and Fane has been at Oxford. Drake stands his friend a drink, and in a moment of expansiveness—sublimely unconscious of the great gulf which now yawns between them—suggests that Fane might like to join his Club.

"Aren't you coming up West a bit?" asked Drake, in disappointment. "The night's still young."

But Michael was not to be persuaded.

" Well, don't let's lose sight of each other now we've met. What's your Club? I've just joined the Primrose myself. Not a bad little place. You get a rare good one-and-sixpenny lunch. You ought to join. Or perhaps you're already suited? "

" I belong to the Bath," said Michael.

" Oh, of course, if you're suited that's all right. But any time you want to join the Primrose just let me know and I'll put you up. The sub. isn't really very much. Guinea a year."

Drake, who, after four years in the City, is probably doing quite well, and knows possibly more about London than Michael, has already been made to ask if Cheyne Walk (whither the Fanes have gone to live) isn't " somewhere out Hampstead way." Here it is impossible not to feel that Mr. Mackenzie has strained the probabilities to bursting point in thus making him the foil to Michael's vulgarity. It is only Drake's side of the exquisite dialogue I have quoted which is incredible. Michael, as Mr. Mackenzie has already proved to the hilt, is capable of anything.

Guy and Pauline, which shows young Oxford after it has " gone down " making a feeble attempt at love and life in a country village, draws a more grisly picture of our upper-middle class in pre-war days even than *Sinister Street*. *Sinister Street*

merely forewarns us of the tragic fiasco which in *Guy and Pauline* is described in detail. Guy is shown us in the grip of his own artificiality, unable to shake himself free from the effects of his shoddy education, unable to live, and without even that saving Russian pessimism which might have spurred him on to self-destruction. It is a grey story, concerning itself at portentous length with the make-believe emotions and philanderings of two people who simply do not matter. And since there is nothing to dazzle the eye, no massing of bright colours, nothing in the way of *divertissement* for the unfortunate reader, it is by far the most tedious of Mr. Mackenzie's works. There is nothing in the book to distract attention from the inner emptiness of its author's mind. Poetic epithets such as " nacreous," " crepuscular," " ombre " and so on—coined in the Wardour Street of 1895—glitter like glass emeralds in a desert of fine writing, and serve only to emphasise the book's vacuity.

From every point of view Mr. Mackenzie's later novels, *Sylvia Scarlett*, *Sylvia and Michael*, and *Poor Relations*, seem to me the most satisfactory of his works. They are glorified " dime novels," thoroughly readable and amusing, full of colour, and as sumptuous as the productions of the late Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Sylvia is, psychologically, perhaps the most interesting of Mr.

Mackenzie's creations when we grasp her secret. For she is not really a woman, but a young man of a type which is the distinctive product of all decadent civilisations. Change Sylvia's sex and you have a character study of decided pathological interest, well worth serious attention.

In all his later books Mr. Mackenzie has made a successful effort to leave off writing about priggish undergraduates; and he has covered up his inability to describe the real emotions and experiences of real people by diverting his readers with a series of vivid pictures. Perhaps he has realised that the public is mad about "the pictures," and has accordingly decided to compete with the "movies" on their own ground. He does so successfully, and the general public has responded as it ought to do. I would certainly far rather spend eight-and-sixpence on a new story by Mr. Mackenzie than two-and-fourpence on "Tarzan of the Apes," or "The Adventures of Elaine." The entertainment is of the same genre, but Mr. Mackenzie does it far better. To withhold gratitude from those who afford us harmless amusement is the act of a curmudgeon. Mr. Mackenzie has found himself—not as a serious novelist, but as that very valuable thing, an entertainer. As such the success which he has achieved is thoroughly deserved.

II. Hugh Walpole

A student of English manners and psychology, anxious to get some idea of the thoughts and feelings of our landed gentry between the years 1910 and 1920, could, I think, hardly do better than study the novels of Mr. Hugh Walpole.

For Mr. Walpole has done for our old nobility and its offshoots very much what Mr. Compton Mackenzie has done for the youth of our professional and upper-middle class. Like Mr. Henry James, whose influence on his work is observable, Mr. Walpole has an instinctive fondness for that select *enclave*, now gradually being left stranded because of its reduced circumstances and its obstinacy, which contains "the best people." The corner of our social life which he has chosen to explore is a trifle absurd, a trifle pathetic; but at least it is life of a sort. In ten years' time, perhaps, the "hopeless" but rather delightful people who in his pages take such a dominant position in the country's affairs, who belong so very definitely to the "ruling class," may be pushed altogether out of the limelight. When that happens Mr. Walpole's novels will always be available to remind us of what they were like.

For Mr. Walpole is charmingly old-fashioned enough to have a liking for duchesses; they really

thrill him. And, for the moment, his books appeal chiefly to those novel readers who also have a liking for duchesses. (The people who are most keenly interested in titles are not housemaids, as it is a popular fallacy to suppose, but the titled.)

Mr. Walpole's colours are not so gorgeous or splashed on with so much vigour as Mr. Mackenzie's, but the tapestry into which he weaves them has usually some distinction of design. Where Mr. Mackenzie favours the Chronicle, and is forced to leave it fragmentary because he can neither suggest nor select, Mr. Walpole favours the "theme." The simile of tapestry is not inapt for his novels, for they are usually flat, without much atmosphere or movement, and his colours, though always the latest fashionable shades, do not palpitate, and suffer from lack of sunlight, like the colours of the academic painters of the early nineteenth century. Mr. Walpole, perhaps more than any of his distinguished contemporaries, is at pains to keep in the forefront of fashion. He has a sharp eye for the latest literary modes, for the correct political, moral or æsthetic opinions; and he is not above taking notice of the other fellow's tricks. Any small innovation in the way of description which strikes him as being new or smart he is apt, subconsciously, to assimilate and reproduce. He will describe the raising of a woman's arm, the feeling

of opening your napkin at dinner in a strange house, the look of Piccadilly Circus on an evening in the Season, just as one or other of his contemporaries might do it, but with the personal touch omitted.

From my point of view, since I do not belong to the "best people," and thus have no intense personal interest in their doings, what is most tedious about Mr. Walpole's later books is their lack of variety in characterisation. The family likeness between all his men and women is too strongly marked. The Beaminsters in *The Duchess of Wrexe* have a kind of immovable, unchangeable quality which is doubtless true to life; but when the same figures are reproduced again and again the tapestry degenerates into figured wall-paper, and his procession of elegant people suggests the stage army which multiplies itself indefinitely. It is really little to be wondered at that when, for the purposes of his plots, Mr. Walpole brings ordinary men and women from the romantic, complex, outside world into the prim cage in which his Beaminsters and Trenchards chirrup, strut and quarrel they seem immediately to become asphyxiated. For example, when Philip Mark, who leaves behind him a mistress and all sorts of highly-coloured experiences in Russia, is brought within the purview of *The Green Mirror* he at

once becomes paralysed in action and distorted in appearance. This may be true to life—indeed we all know how often it happens that when a man strays from the outer world into Mr. Walpole's favourite enclosure he loses his identity and all that made him lovable or vital—but by making the less devour the greater it undoubtedly damps down the interest of the ordinary reader, and gives him a feeling of oppression.

And the trouble is that Mr. Walpole himself seems only able to glimpse the real world of men and women through the medium of a mirror which is just as distorting as that of the Trenchards! Our English "best people" are perhaps as incapable as were the Bourbons of learning anything or of forgetting anything. For them you are either "known," or you are a servant, or an "artist" (painter or back-haired musician), or else you "don't exist." When Mr. Walpole writes of people who don't belong to his world, he writes of those who really, for him, "do not exist"; and he is unable to make them exist on paper. This inability, for which he is in no way to be blamed, has in the last few years received a peculiarly cruel exposure at the hand of Fate. What unlucky chance it was that sent Mr. Walpole to Russia, I do not know. Russia has been the grave of many reputations; and our Napoleon of the drawing-room novel has

fared no better than other would-be conquerors of that disconcerting land. Events have treated him as cruelly as they treated Mr. Stephen Graham.

In the light of what has happened in Russia within the past three years (disregarding for the moment all the details which are still in dispute) I think I can understand the reason for the paroxysms of rage into which *The Secret City* has thrown my Russian friends and acquaintances. For *The Secret City* gives us a glimpse of Petrograd as it might be reflected by Mr. Walpole's green mirror. The book is so confident, so knowledgeable, so perilously sure and efficient—in a word, so precisely like one of those Foreign Office reports on which our daily diplomatic blunders have for years past been based! In Durward, Bohun and Lawrence we have three examples of our ruling class mentality. Durward and Bohun are precisely alike, though Durward, who is the teller of the story (and a frightfully experienced and lofty personage), is constantly inviting his audience to laugh at Bohun's cocksureness. Lawrence is a little duller, is a little more solid and worthy than the other two, but just as much a slave of the "mirror." In these three men may be found the quintessence of almost all that is connoted by the word "English" for the half-incredulous, half-furious foreigner; and in reading about them one does not know

whether to laugh or to cry. Mr. Walpole's three propagandists present the same ridiculous appearance as would Don Quixote in an aeroplane. On the surface, he himself seems aware of their absurdity. He laughs at them, but it is a complacent laughter—in short, it is an expression of that "Englishman's sense of humour" which is deliberately calculated to cast a veil over all that is moving or terrible or true. For this sense of humour is the aristocratic Englishman's coat of mail. Nothing can penetrate it; no cry of anguish from the "masses" can pierce it; nothing that is actual can touch it. In the old-fashioned, easy-going wars, before the discoveries of modern science had been turned to the purposes of destruction, it helped to make the English gentleman an inimitable figure—something unique in Europe. But its day is over, and what was once a virtue survives now only as a disastrous habit. One feels, in reading *The Secret City*, that Lord Milner (the most illustriously misleading of the many observers sent out by us to report on Russian conditions) must have had a sense of humour no less acute than that of Mr. Walpole's propagandists.

His Russian experiences were an unfair test of Mr. Walpole's mentality, intellectual equipment and powers of penetration. But perhaps, as a result of them, sooner or later the scales will fall

from his eyes, he will suddenly become conscious, and he will heave a piece of rock through that green mirror which has till now enchanted and enchained him. As a novelist his manner is on the whole better than his matter; yet one of his early stories, *Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill*, that memorable human drama, revealed in him qualities of which he has not since made use. This is a pity, for his later books—agreeable, even brilliant as they are—are studies only in stagnation. They introduce us to charming, limited, well-bred men and women, with distinguished manners, who have inherited a point of view which they are not strong enough or alive enough to disown. They are all immensely refined; but they have no fineness. To read about them is to go through the sensation of putting on one's high hat and grandpapa's Sunday trousers and making a call in Rutland Gate! Perhaps it is not too late yet for Mr. Walpole to forget that past which lingers in the faded drawing-rooms of his Beaminsters and Trenchards and to wake up in the present. It is to be hoped so, for it is in to-day, and still more perhaps in to-morrow, that both romance and reality are to be found by those whose eyes are opened and who have been able to discard the distorting spectacles of our English "sense of humour."

III. Gilbert Cannan

The literary career of Mr. Gilbert Cannan, the bad boy of the Georgian novelists, has so far been much more exciting than that of either Mr. Walpole or Mr. Mackenzie, though perhaps less successful commercially. It has in many ways been an adventurous career, full of experiment and variety of endeavour—a tentative, groping, dissatisfied kind of career. Throughout it Mr. Cannan's worst enemy has been his own cleverness. In his life as an artist this cleverness has been his greatest danger; it has constantly tripped him up, interposed itself between him and his inspiration, and at times lured him into a display of mere mental gymnastics.

Whereas Messrs. Mackenzie and Walpole have applied themselves almost exclusively to the business of producing fiction, Mr. Cannan has had a shot at nearly everything. He has experimented with the art of satire, written a treatise on it and produced a brilliant book called *Windmills*. He has written, with much gusto, an appreciation of Sam Butler. Then, in a moment of aberration, he has published a volume of unreadable love poems, now, happily, all sunk beneath the wave. Again, in another evil moment—bewitched, no doubt, by

one of those " art " coteries which exist in London in such profusion—he has produced an " artistic " peasant play called *Miles Dixon*. It is written in that English equivalent of Kiltartan which Mr. Masefield first popularised in *Nan*, and reeks with the fumes of Café Royal *consommations* masquerading as fresh air. But as if to atone for it, Mr. Cannan has also given us *Inquest on Pierrot* and *Everybody's Husband*. Then, in a different frame of mind, he has made an admirable translation of Romain Rolland's *Jean Cristophe*. During the War, in an outburst of glorious indignation, he began a vast, sloppy Don Juanesque " epic in ten cantos " called *Noel*, which broke in like a gust of acrid laughter on the national self-complacency. This mood, unfortunately, was not continued. The War, instead of liberating him from his self-consciousness, his undue subjectivity, seems to have narrowed his outlook, impaired his mental equilibrium and upset his sense of values. Such novels as *Pink Roses*, *Mummery* and *Time and Eternity* are a running away from the intellectual conflict, a nervous defection. It is as though real life, with its bloody struggle on both the spiritual and material planes, had proved too much for his stomach. He withdrew from the fight, turned away from everything genuine and essential, and devoted his talent to describing those sub-human

types who were able "to forget the War." The prostitutes, wasters and artistic riff-raff who figure in the three novels just mentioned make one wish to vomit, and it is only fair to suppose that they have much the same effect on their photographer. But Mr. Cannan has been unable to shake himself free from the delusion that such people are worth writing about. And he is unable even to write of them with detachment, but only with superiority. This superiority, and also his temporary blindness to values, are displayed lamentably in *Time and Eternity*. To stick one's fountain pen into this quivering, pathetic book would perhaps be indecently cruel. It is probably a result of war nerves, and one closes it with a feeling of intense depression. It makes one hope that Mr. Cannan will go back to the provinces and give us again real human beings, if he cannot discover any in London, and if his imagination is unequal to the task of creating them.

If one looks at Mr. Cannan's work as a whole, disregarding the three novels referred to above, which are the result of abnormal conditions, it will be seen that he has, in the past, touched life at many points, and has never for long allowed himself to remain in any intellectual rut. He has theories on the way things ought to be done, on the sort of plays which ought to be written, on politics

and sociology. He has occasionally been attracted by movements and frequently seduced by ideas. And all these things, when he has digested them and distilled from them what he needs for his art, may eventually give him a place among the English novelists of lasting interest. His favourite ideas are frequently subversive. Very few of them would be considered quite respectable by the "dear Dean," who thinks so highly of Mr. Mackenzie and of Mr. Walpole.

It is precisely Mr. Cannan's susceptibility to ideas, his restlessness and his dissatisfactions which combine to make him one of the most hopeful literary figures of to-day. All his experiments indicate that he is groping to find the heart of things, to discover what is real in human life, to catch a glimpse of the back of beyond. And in the past, at any rate, he has shown signs of being less complacent about the art of writing than many of his rivals. He has, perhaps, been on the watch to try to put off cleverness, and where his inspiration comes freshly from the heart, as in *Round the Corner*, and, in a less degree, in *Old Mole* and in *Mendel*, he largely (though not completely) succeeds in doing so. These three books, and passages in *The Stucco House* and *Three Pretty Men*, come through on their sincerity, and are made fragrant by flashes of human sympathy, imagination and

fancy which that sincerity has succeeded in liberating.

Mr. Cannan is a writer who has yet to find himself, has yet to discover what it is that he can do best and, concentrating on that thing, to produce a work of art which shall fulfil all the promise which his various literary experiments have given so abundantly. The discovery once made, if he have only the strength of character to eschew versatility, he may find himself linked no longer with mere entertainers like Mr. Mackenzie, or with talented drawing-room novelists like Mr. Walpole, but recognised with Mr. D. H. Lawrence as one of the great novelists of the England of to-morrow. For Mr. Cannan is that now rare bird, an Englishman conscious of his nationality. His voice is an English voice, and he has it in him to render articulate that which is most truly English in the thought of his time.

THE LATER WORK OF D. H. LAWRENCE

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When we look back on our first meeting with those people who in our lives have affected us most deeply, we have occasionally to reproach ourselves for what, in the light of later experiences, seems a shameful lack of perception on our part. We remember how we failed to appreciate immediately this or that person whom we now venerate—how we thought him a little dull. He was silent, perhaps, had no engaging small talk; and his oddity, instead of intriguing us, was merely irritating. In short, on the occasion of that first encounter, which turned out later to have been an event of so much importance in our lives, we saw nothing in our future friend, and disliked the nothing that we saw. Then came the gradual change in our attitude, the belated realisation. But during the time it took us to reach the stage of understanding, in some degree, the complexities of the individual who at first baffled us or seemed repellent—but not of understanding them so well as to preclude the possibility of still further surprises—by how many

acquaintances, now scarcely remembered by name, were we not momentarily charmed? The man most worth knowing is, indeed, never quite knowable: there is something left over, something still in reserve, which maintains the bond unbroken. It is just the same with books as with persons. There are the books we skim, laugh at and throw away for ever; and those which are forbidding and difficult, which reveal their beauties only if assiduously wooed and worked at, which for adequate appreciation demand from their readers a period of brooding and digestion. And these are the books which, when it came to the point, we should probably take with us to that hypothetical desert island. They might not be the "hundred best," but they might easily turn out to be the hundred most aloof.

Aloofness is certainly not the distinguishing quality of English letters at the present day. Indeed, there was perhaps never a time when our scribes were more uniformly ingratiating or struggled more desperately to please. No pretty lady or earnest young curate has ever approached some of our leading novelists and quill-drivers in the fervour of their desire to make a good impression. During the War period especially, the great mass of current literature cowered like a veritable Uriah Heep before public opinion, rubbing its hands with invisible soft soap. Now it put on an alluring smile

and cracked on a top note of patriot " propaganda," now dropped a crocodile tear, now did a bit of " sunburstry " or provided a diverting display of verbal fireworks. Throw down a shilling and its one-man-bands would play you any tune you pleased. And even when it was naughty (for two shillings), it was oh ! so careful to show that all the time its heart was in the right place. Our literature and journalism, our writers and journalists seemed to strive, almost with one accord, to reflect every popular prejudice and to echo every popular *banalité*. There was scarcely to be found a single " conscientious objector " among them who had the pluck to follow his own road, giving the herd—in passing—a sound clump over its collective *tête de mouton !*

Among the exceptions to this generalisation—which is perhaps no more unjust than most—the name of Mr. D. H. Lawrence occurs immediately to the mind. No fawnings here, no parade of cheap attractions, no cadging from the crowd with a display of grease and grins ! Mr. Lawrence has always been obstinately himself ; your kind favours will make no difference to him and are certainly not " solicited."

From the occasion of his first appearance on the literary horizon Mr. Lawrence has been a difficult writer. He has never made any advances to the

mob; and even his prose style is a kind of barricade to prevent the intrusion of the many into the walled garden of his mind. At one time an additional barricade between his work and those who have subsequently appreciated his individual genius was erected by the "boosting" of a certain inner circle of the leaders of literary fashion. The very peculiarities of such early books as *The White Peacock* attracted this *claque*, with its flair for the less important phenomena of genius. For a little while they pretended to consider Mr. Lawrence the white hope of English letters; and they succeeded in making his books the vogue among a section of the London intelligentsia. It became the correct thing to admire Mr. Lawrence—until he suddenly applied the acid test of the value of these protestations and of this admiration by publishing *The Rainbow*. Then what a change of front! The deafening silence, broken only by the sound of the white rabbits of criticism scuttling for cover, which formed the sequel to *The Rainbow* prosecution, will not soon be forgotten by those who were in London at the time. Not one of Mr. Lawrence's fervent boosters ventured into print to defend him; not one of his brother authors (save only Mr. Arnold Bennett, to whom all honour is due) took up the cudgels on his behalf. English novelists are proverbially lacking in esprit de corps, but surely

they were never so badly shown up as when they tolerated this persecution of a distinguished confrère without making a collective protest. But our intelligentsia has always been more fickle and cowardly than the man in the street whom it so dearly loves to deride. All this is not to prove that *The Rainbow* is a satisfactory book. In many ways, irrespective of its fate, it is, as a work of art, perhaps one of the least successful novels which Mr. Lawrence has written, as it is the most ambitious. But if it must be called a failure, it is at all events a splendid and not an ignoble failure.

The chief effect of *The Rainbow* affair on Mr. Lawrence seems to have been to cause him to retire more deeply into himself. His work has become more difficult, his peculiar transcendental philosophy more obscure. He has sought more and more to discard inessentials, to ignore the surface of things, until gradually he has released himself even from the unconscious nationalism of *Sons and Lovers*. In that most beautiful and perhaps immortal novel, he has shown us the very heart of the real England, the England which still has a heart. The book is full of the true English spirit, is fragrant with a love of England, is in the best sense national, so that it can hardly fail to reveal to the middle-class Imperialist "Britisher" who reads it the heart of the "English" Englishman.

But in his last few volumes, *Twilight in Italy*, *Look! We Have Come Through!* and *New Poems*, and in a remarkable series of essays which he contributed to *The English Review*, Mr. Lawrence is concerned with humanity as a whole. He has transcended nationalism, and views the agonies inherent in the marriage of man's soul and body from the standpoint of his mystical philosophy. The argument of *Look! We Have Come Through!* sets forth a spiritual conflict at once individual and universal, a conflict of absorbing interest to any human being, regardless of creed or race, who has reached the stage of development necessary to its understanding. As a poet, he is concerned only with what is at the very core of human life, and thus his work—to borrow the phrase currently applied to pictures and statues of a certain kind—has always a " beyond " to it. All great poets, by the divine accident which we call inspiration, show us at moments, and often quite unconsciously, a glimpse of this beyond. Mr. Lawrence's moments of illumination (and perhaps this proves that in a strict sense he is not a " great poet ") are, however, never quite unconscious. He seems overwhelmed by what he has seen, to have seen more than he can possibly express, perhaps more than is expressible —in words. His quest is for the means to be articulate. He strives, often with a kind of desperation,

to clothe his vision in words, and frequently his poems are battlefields on which he has been defeated. There are times, also, when he is like a man who has been blind, who is just recovering the use of his eyes and is convulsed with the effort to see a little more, a little further into the radiant world which is within an ace of being miraculously restored to his vision. Now he has a sudden glimpse, and in a flash a new heaven and a new earth reveal themselves; but again, in a moment, all is chaos and obscurity, a veil of clouds and a rushing of waters. Thus the poems at the end of *Look! We Have Come Through!* called "New Heaven and Earth," "Elysium," "Manifesto," and "Craving for Spring," contain alternately passages of great sublimity which do indeed open windows in the mind, and passages of mere bathos and confusion.

Of those who have the patience to read the book through, few, however, will miss the significance of lines such as these—

"When I am trodden quite out, quite, quite out
every vestige gone, then I am here
risen, and setting my foot on another world
risen, accomplishing a resurrection
risen, not born again, but risen, body the same as before,
new beyond knowledge of newness, alive beyond life
proud beyond inkling or furthest conception of pride
living where life was never yet dreamed of, nor hinted at
here, in the other world, still terrestrial
myself, the same as before, yet unaccountably new."

Then comes the ecstasy of discovery—

" Ha, I was a blaze leaping up !
I was a tiger bursting into sunlight.
I was greedy, I was mad for the unknown.
I, new-risen, resurrected, starved from the tomb
starved from a life of devouring always myself,
now here was I, new-awakened, with my hand stretching out
and touching the unknown, the real unknown,
the unknown unknown."

In " Elysium " he returns to a favourite theme—

" Delivered helpless and amazed
From the womb of the All, I am waiting, dazed
For memory to be erased.

Then I shall know the Elysium
That lies outside the monstrous womb
Of time from out of which I come."

" Manifesto," an effort to explain the author's sexual philosophy, seems to me to contain more confusion, mingled with commonplace ideas, than the other metaphysical poems, and to have fewer flashes of illumination. But as a statement of some of the cardinal points in Mr. Lawrence's belief, some passages in it have an obvious interest and value—

" Let them praise desire who will,
but only fulfilment will do,
real fulfilment, nothing short.

It is our ratification
our heaven, as a matter of fact.
Immortality, the heaven, is only a projection of
this strange but actual fulfilment,
here in the flesh."

Many mystics have tried to deny sex altogether, but Mr. Lawrence sees in the bodily union of men and women the central mystery of human life, a mystery indissolubly connected with every real religious impulse of mankind, a symbol of an ultimate spiritual consummation.

Perhaps the most profound and moving poem in this volume is the last one, "Craving for Spring." It is a passionate appeal to Life not to forsake the frozen and corrupt world, not to leave it under the dominion of Death.

"Come quickly, and vindicate us
against too much death.
Come quickly, and stir the rotten globe of the
world from within,
burst it with germination, with world anew.
Come now, to us, your adherents, who cannot
flower from the ice.
All the world gleams with the lilies of Death the
Unconquerable,
but come, give us our turn.
Enough of the virgins and lilies, of passionate,
suffocating perfume of corruption,
no more narcissus perfume, lily harlots, the blades
of sensation
piercing the flesh to blossom of death.
Have done, have done with this shuddering,

delicious business
of thrilling ruin in the flesh, of pungent passion,
of rare, death-edged ecstacy.
Give us our turn, give us a chance, let our hour strike,
O soon, soon!
Let the darkness turn violet with rich dawn.
Let the darkness be warmed, warmed through to a ruddy violet,
incipient purpling towards summer in the world
of the heart of man."

There are people, perhaps, to whom the passage quoted above, and indeed the whole poem, may sound like the vapourings of a madman. To others it will sound like a kind of martial music of the soul, filling them with strange fervours and with unspeakable longing.

When Mr. Lawrence drops the cloak of the seer and squeezes his individuality into the confines of more or less "ordinary" verse, he moves about with a power and confidence which few of his contemporaries can equal. He comes down from metaphysics into the art of poetry, "trailing clouds of glory," and seems to see all the visible world with freshened eyes, and as if for the first time. Nature reveals her secrets to him as she has done to few poets and those only the most cherished. When he uses more or less conventional metres—as in the "Hymn to Priapus," in "A Youth Mowing," "Giorno dei Morti," "Sunday Afternoon in Italy," and the wonderful "Ballad of a Wilful Woman"—

he gives them always a personal, unconventional twist, and evolves a new, strange and beautiful music. The following verses from the "Ballad of a Wilful Woman" will serve to illustrate his use of metre—

"While Joseph pitches the sleep-tent
She goes far down to the shore
To where a man in a heaving boat
Waits with a lifted oar.

. . . .

They dwelt in a huge, hoarse sea-cave
And looked far down the dark,
Where an archway torn and glittering
Shone like a huge sea-spark.

He said: 'Do you see the spirits
Crowding the bright doorway?'
He said: 'Do you hear them whispering?'
He said: 'Do you catch what they say?'"

The whole volume is full of brief, vivid, unforgettable pictures and images, like the following sketch of a type of young woman whom the poet calls "Frost flowers"—young women who—

"dart and flash
before the shops like wagtails on the edge of a pool."

Or this, from a poem called "People"—

"The great gold apples of night
Hang from the street's long bough."

And in the piece called " The Sea," Mr. Lawrence shows once again—as he showed in *The Trespasser* and in several of his other books—that he understands the sea as truly as the greatest of his country's poets, and that he feels for it something which only Englishmen seem to have been able to express.

A good deal of Mr. Lawrence's later work, for reasons which have already been given, leaves the reader with a sense of disappointment. Sometimes, when he strives hardest to liberate his ideas, he creates only the chaos which he has himself defined—

> " What is chaos, my love?
> It is not freedom.
> A disarray of falling stars coming to nought."

But how thankful we should be for the achievement of this lonely genius! Even when his verse is most chaotic, even when he most fails to set free his own thought and his poetry most nearly resembles " a disarray of falling stars," the sparks from the furnace of his inspiration retain sufficient heat to enable them to set fire to the minds on which they fall.

MR. WELLS AND THE WAR

MR. WELLS AND THE WAR

When the average Englishman reads that some hundreds of his Indian fellow-citizens have been shot down by order of a British general officer, when he learns, from his morning paper, a few of the more lurid details of the behaviour of our military and bureaucratic Mandarins in Egypt, in Ireland, in Ceylon or Singapore, he feels, it is true, a momentary uneasiness. "I say, you know, this is going a bit far!" But on the whole his view of the atrocities committed daily in his name is that somehow or another they must be all for the best. England, of course, is always right; she always has been, she always will be. "Leave it to the Army," "Leave it to the men at the top," leave it, in short, to any one you like except to comfortable John Bull, who catches the five-fifteen every week-day afternoon and plays a round of golf religiously each Sunday. The mangled victims of England's mailed fist, when you come to think of it, are fairly certain to be criminals who richly deserve their fate. To sympathise too much with

the murdered would be unpatriotic, would, in fact, be "shaking hands with murder"! And so the fun is allowed to continue, the volcano smokes ominously, but our good, easy folk sleep happily in their beds, resting after the tense emotions of five agonising years. It is the nemesis of every victory, this profound slumber of the victorious.

But there is something more in our national apathy towards the deeds which are done in our name than mere spiritual numbness. There is a deeper cause even than the reaction after victory. It is to be found in that deliberate poisoning of the wells of human feeling, that organised campaign of lying and incitement to hatred (and thus to "atrocity"), which began in August 1914 and continues even now, nearly two years after the cessation of hostilities. In this campaign our greatest newspapers have mobilised the ablest members of their staffs; in it, also, some of our most influential novelists and imaginative writers have engaged with all the energy and skill at their command. Even so, it would never have succeeded as it did if the honest and the decent elements in the English writing fraternity had all united to oppose it. Had they spoken out instead of keeping silence, it is true they might not have "saved their skins," but they might have done something to clear our national good name of one of its

darkest stains. And they might also have preserved us from that disease of indifference which has caused a nation as sound at heart as our own to allow its irresponsible Government to murder millions of poor people by a misuse of the Blockade.

To go over in one's mind the names of the men who have been prominent in British war journalism is calculated to give any honest man a respect neither for Britain nor for its journalists. To many men of the younger generation who fought in the War, it now seems incredible that during their absence the inciters to hatred and slaughter could ever have contrived to get such a stranglehold on public opinion. The "Pacifists" are not similarly bewildered. We know that they were able to do it by battening on the terrors and prejudices inevitably occasioned by warfare, and by inflaming the passions of the mob by atrocity stories and distorted news. And we know that they were also able to do it because of the active help, or the tacit connivance, of the men whose reputations as leaders of thought or as national spokesmen stood highest with the community.

Insurgent youth is not going to waste its time denouncing the "arm-chair" militarists. It is probable that many of these were quite honest and sincere; at all events, they did not sin against the light. But what is to be said of the "intellec-

tuals," the sham progressives, the Higher Thinkers who throughout the War yoked themselves tamely to the capitalist-driven car of State, took Government jobs, and regularly—from the democratic standpoint—sold every pass? Had these men possessed sufficient moral courage they could soon have made the Censorship unworkable. Not even the Coalition could have continued with all the organs of Radical opinion closed down and all the exponents of Radical ideas silenced or in gaol. Had there been any real show of resistance, any real backbone among our leading democratic publicists, Mr. George and his confrères would have been compelled to make some concessions to the national sense of decency. I am not speaking now as a "defeatist." I believe that such concessions would in no way have impaired the efficient conduct of the War, while they would certainly have improved the chances of a clean and democratic settlement. And if, by the courageous expression of Liberal principles, we had given the German moderates something better to hope for than the "knock-out blow," there is little reason to doubt that they would have been able to exert such pressure on their Government as would have resulted in the ending of the War many months earlier than November 1918. A little courage, a little resolute plain-speaking, and not only might thousands, perhaps

millions of lives have been saved, but the world might have been preserved from that nightmare of horror, that frightful menace to our entire civilisation which has been secretly concocted in Paris and blasphemously labelled "Peace."

No, it is not the war-records of our "yellow" journalists that the youth of England will concern itself to examine, but the records of those who before the outbreak of the War were accounted our leaders in the struggle towards progress. How have these leaders acquitted themselves? Can we trust them any more? What have they done for us? Do they deserve our continued allegiance, or have they forced us to disown them?

Such men as Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Arnold Bennett, John Galsworthy, G. K. Chesterton, Bertrand Russell, Vernon Lee, W. L. George, Evelyn Sharp, E. D. Morel, Norman Angell, Gilbert Cannan, Hilaire Belloc, J. C. Squire—to take a handful of prominent names at random—will doubtless be separated by the historian, abruptly and without peradventure, into two groups. In the first will come those who maintained unblemished their intellectual honesty, who faced loss of income, persecution and even imprisonment rather than compromise with the truth as they saw it or allow themselves to be intimidated into silence. In the second category will be placed those who ratted

from the intellectual conflict, who made war profits out of the nation's peril, lent their aid to Government propaganda, and encouraged either actively (or by their silence) all those evils of rampant militarism from which the common people of the British Empire are now everywhere suffering.

When I say that these eminent writers will be divided without peradventure into two groups, I really mean by St. Peter or some other heavenly archivist who has their complete dossiers in front of him. Their fallible juniors, anxious to discover whom they can trust to help them during the years of danger and difficulty which lie ahead, can only do their imperfect best to arrive at just conclusions. If their judgments involve the rejection of individuals, then at least it is incumbent upon them to treat their lost leaders as leniently as possible. The history of human progress is, alas, studded with the names of "lost leaders," of terrified teachers dissociating themselves hastily from the taught. "Just for a handful of silver he left us, just for a ribband to stick in his coat," is the sort of reproach which has been levelled times without number against men whose speeches or whose writings once influenced insurgent youth. Alas, it is a well-known failing of those who preach revolutionary doctrines to desert their disciples at the first hint of danger. And now that the War is over and

the red waves of democracy are everywhere rolling forward—inevitably, inexorably, like the oncoming of a great tide—there is a temptation to indulge in bitterness, and to long for revenge against men who, whether as writers or as politicians, seem to have betrayed their trust. But an era of world brotherhood will not be ushered in by hanging Lord Northcliffe from a lamp-post in Carmelite Street, or by dealing faithfully with men who have disappointed some of their followers as profoundly as Mr. H. G. Wells. The problem before the Socialist is rather one of analysing the intellectual development of those who were his teachers, and of finding out how far, in the new world period which lies ahead of us, he can continue to accept their message. For we can no longer afford to be hypnotised, as we were so often in the past, by the sound of an illustrious name. No public in the world remains so faithful to the individuals whom it has once decided to honour as the British public, and this fidelity is at once a virtue and a vice. In so far as it springs from intellectual laziness it is purely a vice, and a dangerous vice, dangerous both to the eminent and to their admirers.

Among the leaders of democratic thought in England during the past twenty-five years, no individual has been more prominent, or more justly acclaimed than Mr. H. G. Wells. Perhaps no other

writer, with the exception of Mr. Bernard Shaw, has exerted a more profound and widespread influence on the minds of the younger generation of English men and women. The debt which all thinking people in this country owe to Mr. Wells is so great that, regardless of his war record (whatever St. Peter may think of it), nobody with a spark of generosity in his composition can fail to acknowledge it with gratitude. But there are dangers in allowing this gratitude to enslave our intelligence. The question must be asked by International Socialists at this juncture whether Mr. Wells is for them or against them. And if he should declare himself on their side, they have to ask themselves further whether they can trust him any longer.

During the War Mr. Wells occupied a special, an almost unique position. Unlike Mr. Shaw, who has, like the prophets, always made a practice of saying five years in advance what the majority of intelligent people will eventually accept as the truth, Mr. Wells has interpreted the best thought current in England at particular moments, in a manner capable of immediate acceptance by large sections of our population. Thus, during the past six years he might, in a very intimate sense, have become our national spokesman. He might have crystallised, more effectively even than President Wilson, the vague hopes and desires of decent

" plain people." He needed but courage in order to reveal to innumerable simple souls what they really, at the bottom of their hearts, thought and felt.

Throughout his career Mr. Wells has been a voluminous publicist. He is a Republican, and for a time he was one of the shining lights of the Fabian Society. That conflict between capital and labour the existence of which the collapse of the enemy has now made clear, even to the densest minds among us, has occupied his attention for years. And, before August 1914, for at least a decade, young men and women in this country had imbibed from Mr. Wells hatred of war, distrust of that capitalism which is the chief underlying cause of war, distrust of monarchy, imperialism, British educational methods, politicians, and our higher bourgeoisie. No one had given more encouragement than Mr. Wells to the growing tendency towards iconoclasm, towards breaking up as a prelude to rebuilding. The seeds of those ideas which under the red flag of the International are now everywhere gaining acceptance were widely sown by him in pre-war England. His novel *The World Set Free*, in which, in the spring of 1914, he foretold the World War, must have " converted " many of the young men and women who, when the War actually broke out, formed the backbone of the

International Socialist party in England. By awakening the consciences of large numbers of his readers in regard to the ethics of mutual murder and capitalist exploitation, he did more than any other Englishman to produce that essentially English product, the "conscientious objector." (For the conscientious objector was merely the British bull-dog biting on an idea, instead of—at the word of command—biting on the seat of the other fellow's breeches.)

When war broke out, while many of Mr. Wells' disciples were keeping alight the flame of those principles which by his eloquence he had instilled into their minds, Mr. Wells himself, like the majority of us, completely lost his head. At one moment he was urging all the middle-aged gentlemen living in the country to clean their rook-rifles so that, when the Hun invaded, they might lurk behind hedges and bag at least a victim apiece before their women were raped—regardless of the fact that, according to those laws of warfare which we observed so faithfully in South Africa, such a proceeding would have justified the Germans in burning every village they entered. This emotional episode, in giving us the clue to Mr. Wells' character, at the same time makes any bitterness we might be tempted to feel towards him unjustifiable. But it also shows us how completely, as an intellectual

leader, he is untrustworthy. For Mr. Wells is a man of genius with a temperament: and allowances must be made for his temperament. He has not, one suspects, the moral and intellectual courage of a Bertrand Russell or a Bernard Shaw, because he does not possess their self-control. He is not one whom we could reasonably expect to die like Giordano Bruno, or even to put himself within reach of Dora. His great virtues are his sensitiveness to ideas, his eager scanning of the future, his belief in and love for humanity, his imagination, and his ability—at his best moments—to combine emotional warmth with a scientific clarity. The value of his political writings has lain always in their suggestiveness. He has the knack of starting trains of thought in his readers' minds. What it is that he is suggesting perhaps very often he does not himself realise, and would endeavour to counteract if he did. He does not deliver a gospel; he pours out the raw material for several contradictory gospels. It is for those who read him to select from his work what is of value to them and resolutely to reject the rest.

If the war has not displayed Mr. Wells in the light of a hero, it has at least revealed him as an honest and lovable human being, intensely emotional, compounded of wisdom and folly, of faults and virtues like the rest of us, but with, on the

whole, a bias towards such things as are decent, humane and democratic.

His war books reflected current opinion, but did not form it. *Mr. Britling Sees it Through* was a brilliant exposition of that first awakening from intellectual numbness which took place in England after the first year of the War. The book did not bring about this awakening, it recorded it. It was published at precisely the right moment and was an immense success. *The Soul of a Bishop*, which followed it, reflected in an eminently prudent manner that half-wistful re-examination of the "Sermon on the Mount" which was occupying the minds of religious people during the period just preceding the Lloyd George-Northcliffe alliance, when Peace was a possibility. The point of the book was so carefully wrapped up that the majority of Mr. Wells' library subscribers and none, apparently, of his reviewers, were able to perceive it. But it was there. The book interpreted what was in the minds of a number of inarticulate people whose religious feeling was leading them towards a demand for peace.

With the arrival of Mr. Lloyd-George's "knock-out" Coalition of politicians and pressmen, there came a fresh and more violent inundation of "hate" journalism. The tired passions of the mob were violently whipped-up. A return to the "War

Spirit" was preached in the columns of the great newspapers; and the people responded. Victory was in sight! One more effort! Another million men! Even transcendental pacifism now meant danger for a popular author. The award for plain speaking and clear thinking was gaol, exile or, at least, financial loss. And never was there a period when the purveyors of higher thought occupied themselves more desperately with the safety and comfort of the higher thinker.

Mr. Wells might at this time have done something to stop the rot, had he possessed the qualities essential in a leader. Not possessing these qualities he once again acted as a "reflector." He crystallised the ideas of our middle classes, but he crystallised (and it is due to him to say it) not their worst ideas, but their best. How bad these were can be seen by any one who cares to study *Joan and Peter*. Perhaps Mr. Wells himself was uneasy and dissatisfied, because this portentously long and jaded novel marks the lowest intellectual level which he has yet touched. On every page it shows lamentable signs of "middle-age Spread." He is unable to discard the rôle of popular educator—the book contains perhaps 500 pages of Wellsian discourse to 250 of story—but he has fled from the task of educating the people about the one subject which agitates their minds. The darkness of war brood-

ing over the whole land is only made darker by him. His pages contain no "light" in the sense in which readers of Henri Barbusse will understand that word. His book merely reflects the misery and bewilderment which afflicted the crowd. Amid the horror and desolation caused by a bankrupt sócial system, at the end of a world period when a civilisation was breaking itself to pieces in the most outrageously unjust war known to history, Mr. Wells consecrated his enormous novel to enshrining and amplifying this profound conclusion: "a world whose schools are unreformed is an unreformed world!" On the delineation of the maker of this aphorism, an Empire-builder named Oswald Sydenham, he has lavished particular care, but it is difficult to believe in this latest edition of the "strong, silent Englishman." In real life Empire-builders are usually strong, silent bores, with tropical livers, whose occasional eruptions of speech will empty a smoking-room in the dullest club in London inside fifteen minutes.

Mr. Wells' Empire-builder has a bee in his bonnet which buzzes loudly—educational reform. The author gives him Joan and Peter on whom to practise his theories, and apparently expects us to admire the result; typical Public Schoolboy, typical Public Schoolgirl. Indeed, Mr. Wells seemed to have discovered the "English gentleman" at

the very moment when the more clear-sighted of his compatriots were beginning to find him out.

One of the most depressing things about this novel was the way it showed how completely Mr. Wells had lost touch with youth. For the quality of youth is not a thing which can be reckoned in terms of years. The average English Public Schoolboy—Peter, in whom Mr. Wells takes so much paternal pride, exemplifies this lamentably—acquires in his schooldays a middle-aged outlook, and seldom succeeds in setting free the spirit of youth imprisoned within him except by a difficult process of rejections and rebellions. But Peter can neither reject nor rebel, and except for the fact that he is a rather more lamentable prig than the average boy unhampered by an Empire-building guardian with a sense of mission, he belongs precisely to the type which the English Public Schools have for generations turned out in tens of thousands. An England of Peters will certainly remain an unreformed England.

It is difficult even to be impressed by Peter's moralisings in hospital (he is an airman and gets wounded) about God, whom he describes as "the old Experimenter." They are just as trite, just as second-hand and shoddy as were those of the boys who read the leading articles in the newspapers instead of—as, presumably, was the case

with Peter—the lyric pages of *God the Invisible King*. The only thing in Peter's favour is that he did not apparently read the verses of Rupert Brooke and decide to turn himself into a " soldier poet."

Joan is a more likeable and slightly less stereotyped figure than Peter; but as a product of educational reform she is pathetic. If this is all we are likely to be able to achieve in our efforts to pull ourselves together, we had better commit race-suicide and have done with it. For Joan also is the pre-war product. As the heroine of a feuilleton called " The Soul of a Waac," she would be perfect. It is only when we think of her as the potential mother of those Englishmen of to-morrow who are going to revive our best traditions that our hearts sink. Alas, she is, from the point of view of the capitalist press, with its debased standard of values, " splendid."

One can imagine her (she is a chauffeur in the Waacs) driving General Dyer to his Amritsar *battue* with as much ecstasy as if she were driving the Almighty to St. Paul's Cathedral. One cannot imagine her worrying her head about the ethics of shooting down unarmed Indians. Certainly one cannot imagine her, in an access of rebellious rage, driving General Dyer into the ditch. But unless educational reform in England is going to turn

English boys and girls into rational human beings capable of generous indignation, incapable of mean and sentimental acquiescence, it will not save us, and it will not be reform.

It is a relief to turn from the Mr. Wells of the last stages of the War to another Mr. Wells, the author of passages such as this: "At first I was extraordinarily excited by my baptism of fire. Then, as the heat of the day came on, I experienced an enormous tedium and discomfort. . . . I kept thinking of the dead Prussian down among the corn and of the bitter outcries of my own men. Damned foolery! It *was* damned foolery. But who was to blame? How had we got to this? . . .

"'From Holland to the Alps this day,' I thought, 'there must be crouching and lying between half and a million of men, trying to inflict irreparable damage upon one another. The thing is idiotic to the pitch of impossibility. It is a dream. Presently I shall wake up. . . .'

"Then the phrase changed itself in my mind. 'Presently mankind will wake up.'

"I lay speculating just how many thousands of men there were, among these hundreds of thousands, whose spirits were in rebellion against all these ancient traditions of flag and empire. Weren't we perhaps already in the throes of the last crisis, in that darkest moment of a nightmare's horror

before the sleeper will endure no more of it—and wakes?"

Mr. Wells has been talking to returned soldiers, you think, and I have stolen into his study and transcribed some lines from the MS. of a forthcoming novel? Not a bit of it. The passage I have quoted was published in the spring of 1914. In the ghastly intervening years many millions of people have "woken up" from their nightmare. The questions postulated by the war have been answered by a great cry of rebellion from millions of human hearts. And Mr. Wells, who had the imagination to realise in advance both questions and answers, has Mr. Wells gone to sleep? If he has, mindful of his many services to humanity, the least we can do is to leave him undisturbed. When he wakes again he will see the forces he once led far in front of him, rushing to attack; and he will have all his work cut out if he wishes to catch them up. If, panting after them, he cries "Stop! stop—I am one of your leaders," it is to be hoped that they will not delay their advance to listen. For, unlike the warfare of guns and tanks, the warfare of ideas cannot be conducted from the rear.

THE WAR AND THE POETS

THE WAR AND THE POETS

Not the least curious among the minor phenomena of the World War was the flood of war verse, by "soldier poets" and others, which found its way into print in England after the lamented death of Rupert Brooke. Poetry, we were assured, was booming. Lying about in every smart London drawing-room you would find the latest little volume, and at every fashionable bookshop the half-crown war poets were among the "best selling lines." We were asked to believe that the European War—unlike all its predecessors known to history, not one of which has ever inspired any art worth mentioning—had really brought to light a wealth of poetic talent. The publishers, faced by the problem of the paper shortage and the resulting necessity of selling very small books at very high prices if they were to make two ends meet, naturally did their bit towards encouraging "the muse in arms." The literary gentlemen who sat in their armchairs and rhapsodised—in the interests of propaganda—about the beauties of war, aided and abetted them

with real fervour. An atmosphere was quickly and easily created favourable to the sale of verse, and the always gullible English public, flattered by the remarks in the Press about its " revived interest in poetry," disbursed its shillings with a lavishness only equalled by its lack of discrimination.

There remained, however, a few obstinate people who declined to allow their critical faculties to be chloroformed by popular sentiment, who continued to believe that although death on the field of battle might gain for the hero instant admission to Valhalla, it was not necessarily a qualification for Parnassus. Such ironsides clung to the notion that it is quality, not quantity, which makes a golden age of literature. And looked at from their point of view, it must be admitted that the influence which the Great War has had on the art of poetry seems to have been as unfortunate as its influence on the sister art of criticism.

The English war poets appear to divide themselves roughly into three sections. The first, and by far the largest section, includes the work of subalterns, fresh from the Public Schools, whose verse is as second-hand and as imitative in form as in sentiment. Then come the few from whom the tragedy of the years since 1914 has wrung a real *cri de cœur*, an honest statement of emotional experience in verse form. Finally we have the

older professional poets and the journalists in verse, who have " carried on " as best they might.

If any student of English life wishes to gain an insight into the real meaning of the Public School spirit, that poisonous anachronism on which our country still prides herself, he cannot do better than study a handful out of the countless volumes of war verse which it has produced. For our Public School system, in its effort to turn out every little Englishman " a thoroughly manly young fellow," succeeds brilliantly in stunting the growth of his thinking apparatus. It preserves him as an intellectual adolescent living in a fairyland of chivalrous illusion, with a blind trust in the doctrines enunciated by the reactionary newspapers. Many of these Public Schoolboy soldiers must have gone straight from the cricket-field and the prefect's study to the trenches, in a kind of waking dream. Their mental equipment for withstanding the shock of experience was as useless as the imitation suit of armour, the dummy lance and shield of the actor in a pageant. It was their false conception of life, their inability to look at facts except through tinted glasses of one particular colour, which rendered the poems of so many young subalterns so valueless as literature, so tragic and accusing as human documents. For they accuse the age which permitted and gloried in an educational system

so monstrously unfair to its victims, and they accuse the schoolmasters who have acquiesced in perpetuating it.

I quote the lines which follow because they are eminently characteristic of the note of scores of books of the kind to which I have just referred. They were picked out for special praise by one of our head masters, in an issue of *The Poetry Review*—

> "Malvern men must die and kill,
> That wind may blow on Malvern Hill;
> Devonshire blood must fall like dew,
> That Devon's bays may yet be blue;
> London must spill out lives like wine,
> That London's lights may ever shine."

This is precisely the doctrine of the "You-go-first" or "Comb-them-all-out-except-me" press, accepted with a blind and touching credulity, and it is certainly not intended to be the scarifying satire which, in effect, it is. It is the kind of thing which during the War was accepted as poetry, even by a journal ostensibly devoted to that art; which the reviewers chose for commendation, and the reading public presumably appreciated.

For the second section into which I have divided the war poets—the section containing those who have something to say, and therefore the only one that really matters—I must confess I have found only a very small group who claim admittance.

Alan Seeger, Wilfred Sorley, and one or two others were moved at moments to sincerity, and some honest and effective verse has been written by Siegfried Sassoon, Robert Graves and Osbert Sitwell.

Of these three Robert Graves is the most fanciful, the least introspective and reflective, the least savage. His poem, "It's a Queer Time," strikes his characteristic note of whimsical resignation. It is a curiously touching poem, and in places curiously vivid—

"Or you'll be dozing safe in your dug-out—
A great roar—the trench falls and shakes about—
You're struggling, gasping, struggling, then . . . hullo!
Elsie comes tripping gaily down the trench,
Hanky to nose—that lyddite makes a stench—
Getting her pinafore all over grime.
Funny! Because she died ten years ago!
It's a queer time."

Mr. Graves has a gentle voice, naturally gay and cheerful, and always his own. He does not probe or question; when the actual becomes unbearable he flies away on the wings of his fancy. Mr. Sassoon, on the other hand, deals chiefly with the actual. His verse is wrought out of the stuff of life, and throughout it all is heard a cry of agony, an agony of compassion. He has not a trace of Mr. Graves' resignation. Indeed the natural rage of a sensitive man at the horrors and stupidity of war—which

but for the blight of tradition must have found a thousand eloquent voices—seems, as far as I can discover, to have been interpreted most powerfully in English verse by Mr. Sassoon. In prose there are many moving passages in the books of Sir Philip Gibbs and Mr. Patrick MacGill and, among continental writers, in those of Andreas Latzko, Duhamel, Henri Barbusse. But of all the war poets whose little volumes were recently so much in evidence Mr. Sassoon was one of the few who had the courage and the sincerity to try to show the War as it was and to utter, not innocuous sentiments, but horrifying truths. And in his poems may, I think, be detected a throwing-off of the mouldy and decrepit "Public School tradition"; an assertion of human brotherhood; a reaching out towards that New World which so many have died to render different from the old.

Mr. Sassoon sees war stripped of all its tawdry gilding, sees it in all its beastliness, in all its futility, in all its pathos. And contrasted with the realities with which every soldier soon became familiar, he notes with bewilderment the unctuous flapdoodle let loose on an illusion-loving public at home by its daily comforter, the Press; the bleatings of the bishops; the blow-the-Bosche-to-bits and fight-till-the-last-combed-out-conscript-falls attitude of profiteering patriots. Here is the end of a poem

called "In the Pink," which illustrates his compassion and his irony—

"He couldn't sleep that night. Still in the dark
He groaned and thought of Sundays at the farm,
When he'd go out as cheerful as a lark
In his best suit to wander arm-in-arm
With brown-eyed Gwen, and whisper in her ear
The simple, silly things she liked to hear.

. . . . . .

And then he thought: to-morrow night we trudge
Up to the trenches, and my boots are rotten.
Five miles of stodgy clay and freezing sludge
And everything but wretchedness forgotten.
To-night he's 'in the pink,' but soon he'll die,
And still the war goes on, *he* don't know why."

The poet's exasperation at the refusal of the respectable people at home, who ran the War and were so chatty about "our brave lads," to realise anything at all about the terrors, hopes, and sufferings of the men whose blood for nearly four years soaked the soil of France, shows itself again and again in this book, and in its successor, *Counter-Attack*. (In *Counter-Attack* Mr. Sassoon develops a vein of satire which might be expected to pierce even the brass armour of a "Galloper Smith"!)

Mr. Sassoon's verse has found favour with his fellow-soldiers, and also with the more human and imaginative sections of the English public. But the great mass of English "patriots," wedded to their illusions as closely as to their war profits, have found

him decidedly uncomfortable reading. "Ah, poor fellow!" they said, "his brain must be unhinged by all that he has been through." And then they, or rather their womenkind, turned hastily, turned with relief, to the "fine sanity" of Mr. John Drinkwater. No one could better act as a sedative after the nervous shock of reading "unhinged" dealers in truth like Mr. Siegfried Sassoon than Mr. Drinkwater. Soothed by his mellifluous strains, half the old ladies who went to Bath to avoid the air raids slid gently into their post-prandial nap—

> "I sing of peace who have known the large unrest,
> Of men bewildered in their travelling,
> And I have known the Bridal earth unblest
> By the Brigades of Spring."

That was the kind of "unrest," the kind of "knowledge" for which the illusion-loving mind craved in war-time. It was distinctly less nerve-racking than such an odious, undraped confrontation with the actual as that provided, for example, by Mr. Sassoon's poem "They"—

> "The Bishop tells us: 'When the boys come back
> They will not be the same; for they'll have fought
> In a just cause.'"

The Bishop develops his platitudes. And then—

> "'We're none of us the same!' the boys reply.
> 'For George lost both his legs; and Bill's stone blind;
> Poor Jim's shot through the lungs and like to die;

And Bert's gone syphilitic; you'll not find
A chap who's served that hasn't found *some* change.'
And the Bishop said: 'The ways of God are strange!'"

Whether Mr. Sassoon, as a poet, has much staying power, or whether he has said already all that he has to say, time alone can show. The work which he has published up to the present leaves the question unanswered. It constitutes a fine achievement; but it makes no promises.

This cannot be said of the verse in Mr. Osbert Sitwell's *Argonaut and Juggernaut*, which is full of "promise." In this volume we find traces of an all-too-rare gift of satire—a satire directed chiefly against the aged armchair warriors on the home front and their women—allied with a queer, luxuriant imagination. Mr. Sitwell is deliberately impatient of the restraints of metre, but these restraints seem rather to suit his temperament, and his work is at its best when he submits to them. Mr. Sitwell is a poet who happened to endure the War; but he is not (like Mr. Sassoon) a "war poet." His greatest danger lies, perhaps, in his facility, and the test of his capacity will come when in a literary verse he gets—or fails to get—his "second wind."

The professional poets and the journalist verse-writers who "dealt with" the War in the ordinary course of business, maintained a fairly respectable

level of literary merit, but it cannot be said that the War inspired them to surpass themselves. Among the younger men, Mr. Robert Nichols, who had the advantage of a fair technical equipment, achieved a popular success with his much-praised *Ardours and Endurances*. After his experiences in the trenches he tried nobly to rise to the occasion, and his poem "The Assault" is the principal result of his efforts. Considered in cold blood, however, it is an empty and pretentious piece of work, too laboured, too patently worked out in accordance with some brand-new "stuntist" theory to be at all impressive. The dabs and splashes of colour, the onomatopæic rendering of gunfire, fail to interest, because the thought underlying the poem is commonplace. (In a year or two, if the human race is to continue at all, let us hope it will have become an absurd memory.)

> "Ha! Ha! Bunched figures waiting.
> Revolver levelled quick!
> Flick! Flick!
> Red as blood.
> Germans. Germans.
> Good! O good!
> Cool madness."

It was characteristic of our war-time criticism that this masterpiece of drivel, instead of exciting derision, was hailed as a work of genius and read

with avidity. On the whole Mr. Nichols is much more sincere and more effective when he is writing about other things than war, and occasionally, as in his poem "The Tower," he achieves beauty of atmosphere and description.

Captain Gilbert Frankau's war poems are topical; they are smart, descriptive journalism done into the slickest modern verse, and their competence lifts them head and shoulders above ninety per cent. of the verse of his brothers in arms. Captain Frankau's talents are considerable and under perfect control, so that whether he is writing about night clubs or trench-lights he is always, as the pressmen say, "in the news." He does not attempt to be profound.

Perhaps the real test of the influence of the war on recent poetry—an influence alleged by our sentimentalists to have been so profoundly inspiring and invigorating—is to be found, not in a study of the younger men, but in an examination of the output during the period of hostilities, of the older poets whose reputations, in 1914, were already established. Did the War actually infuse fresh energy into our surviving Victorian or Edwardian singers? If it did, the masterpieces have been cruelly withheld from a public all agog to receive them.

William Watson, it is true, wrote a sonnet to Lord

Northcliffe and one or two other pieces inspired by current events. He received a knighthood, but his literary reputation has not thereby been increased. Rudyard Kipling exhibited the bankruptcy of his point of view in several archaic bleats, so feeble in thought and style that a practical joker was easily able to hoax one of the leading newspapers into publishing a burlesque of them. And yet, in the piping days of peace, it was Kipling who, more successfully than any other writer, preached the gospel of commercial and militarist Imperialism in Great Britain! Mr. John Masefield, whom one might have imagined the smell of blood would have intoxicated, produced nothing of literary importance, but threw himself with fervour into propagandist journalism intended for consumption in America. Mr. Hardy gave us a few morose and gloomy verses; Mr. Bridges, our Poet Laureate, showed signs of marked discomfort at the realisation of the part he was expected to play; and several other great ones attempted the top note and cracked on it badly. A survey of the poetic output during the War of the established English poets forces one to the conclusion that only those who—like Mr. de la Mare and Mr. D. H. Lawrence—deliberately kept their minds and thoughts on a higher plane, managed to escape its vulgarising influence. During the last year of the War three volumes of new verse

by well-known writers made their appearance—*Motley, and Other Poems*, by Walter de la Mare, *Look! We Have Come Through!* by D. H. Lawrence, and *On Heaven, and other Poems*, by Ford Madox Hueffer. Of these three poets, I believe only Mr. Hueffer served in the trenches. It is an unfortunate fact that of the three it is his work alone which shows marked signs of deterioration. *On Heaven, and other Poems*—the only volume which has come from Mr. Hueffer's pen for some time—is a sad descent, at any rate so far as the war verses in it are concerned, from the general level of his *Collected Poems*. Somehow, in putting on khaki, he seems, like so many other men in the early forties, to have resumed, as far as possible, the outlook of the Public Schoolboy. The tone of his war poems to some extent suggests the "old boy" on a school speech-day, and to one at least of his admirers it was a shock to see a mind which in the recent past had been as active, as daring, as sensitive, as fresh as Mr. Hueffer's, becoming a middle-aged mind. And yet the "old boy" attitude is of the very essence of middle age; it is a deliberate orgy of reaction. Middle age is acquiescent where youth is rebellious. Middle age is intent on recovering the thrill of a dead romance, on reviving an old glamour, while youth "reasons why," strives to break free from the bondage of the past, and peers eagerly into the

future for a glimpse of that glamour which surrounds to-morrow. To middle age "to-morrow" must be the same as yesterday, or it will be indignantly disowned. Youth will have no more of yesterday.

The Great War, which to middle age seemed something infinitely heroic and noble—more noble even than the Eton and Harrow cricket match—to youth more often appeared merely as a tragic farce, an insane contest between rival bands of slaves organised by rival profiteers.

Nothing gives a more dismal indication of the change which has come over Mr. Hueffer's mind than the fact that the qualities of his war poems are almost exclusively those which belong to average descriptive reporting. The artist in him is submerged in the newspaper man, and he hits the bull's eye of "topicality" every time. He can write of wangling leaves from the adjutant, and of machine guns going "wukka wukka" in a way to cause a thrill in the bosom of Mr. Kipling's admirers—

> "And far away to the left
> *Wukka wukka.*
> And sharply,
> *Wuk . . . wuk.*"

Perhaps the true hero of this war was some poor devil who was struck down by a "wukka-wuk" while a roar of derisive laughter broke out of him.

Could only such a great Dionysian laugh now re-echo through the world, the whole silly business might be seen, as by a lightning flash, in just perspective.

The further Mr. Hueffer gets away from the War and popular emotionalism, the more his hand remembers its old cunning. In one poem he begins to sketch some remote and beautiful landscape—

> "The seven white peacocks against the castle wall
> In the high trees and the dusk are like tapestry,
> The sky being orange, the high wall a purple barrier
> The canal, dead silver in the dusk,
> And you are far away.
> Yet I can see infinite miles of mountains.
> Little lights shine in rows in the dark of them. . . . ."

But the second verse opens with "Around me are the two hundred and forty men of B Company," etc., and the poem relapses into the kind of slop which, at the moment it was written, it was almost a criminal offence not to admire. The poem which follows it, "The Silver Music," seems to suggest that the War had temporarily obscured Mr. Hueffer's usually keen faculty of self-criticism. It reads like a parody which he might have composed over the telephone for the benefit of a young friend, as an illustration of the kind of verse *The Spectator* would be certain to print—

> "Oh! I'm weary for the castle,
> And I'm weary for the Wye," etc.

the topographical note, style A. E. Houseman—

> " And another soldier fellow
> Shall come courting of my dear
> And it's I shall not be with her
> With my lips beside her ear."

To the young friend's objection: " How could ' I ' be with her, unless ' I ' were a sort of ghostly gooseberry? " one can almost hear Mr. Hueffer's tired rejoinder: " But, my dear chap, that is just the sort of thing that Strachey *eats!* "

In " One Last Prayer," the musician in Mr. Hueffer asserts himself, and the result is a song which is worthy to rank with " À la Mauresque " in its simplicity and beauty—

> " I have only you beneath the skies
> To rest my eyes
> From the cruel green of the fields
> And the cold, white seas
> And the weary hills
> And the naked trees.
>
> I have known the hundred ills
> Of the hated wars.
> Do not close the bars,
> Or draw the blind.
> I have only you beneath the stars:
> Dear, be kind! "

But, with this exception, the only poem in the book which reaches the level of the author's best work is the one which gives it its title, and this one

was written before the outbreak of war. "On Heaven" seems to have been inspired in the first instance by a desire to show the young American school of poets how very much better an old hand could, if he chose, do their particular "stunt." But once embarked on the poem, the possibilities of the medium seem to have enchanted him, and he has let himself go in an imaginative and emotional rhapsody which is perhaps one of the best things of its kind which has yet appeared. After reading it, one can only hope that Mr. Hueffer's natural force is only temporarily abated, and that his lost youth will soon be restored to him.

Mr. Walter de la Mare's poetry—so pure, so remote—is like an echo from some fairy-land, midway between earth and heaven, to whose gates only poets and children have the key. His melodies are haunting and eerie in their high clarity and strangeness. They are like songs heard at night-time in some deep wood whose paths are chequered by moonlight, whose shadowy thicknesses are thronged with ghosts.

"Breathe not—trespass not;
Of this green and darkling spot,
Latticed from the moon's beams,
Perchance a distant dreamer dreams;
Perchance upon its darkening air,
The unseen ghosts of children fare,
Faintly swinging, sway and sweep,
Like lovely sea-flowers in its deep;

While, unmoved, to watch and ward,
'Mid its gloomed and daisied sward,
Stands, with bowed and dewy head,
That one little leaden lad."

His feeling for Nature and his love of flowers and birds are not surpassed either by Mr. W. H. Davies or by the late Francis Ledwidge, as the little poem called " The Linnet " is enough to indicate—

" Upon this leafy bush
With thorns and roses in it,
Flutters a thing of light,
A twittering linnet.
And all the throbbing world
Of dew and sun and air
By this small parcel of life
Is made more fair;
As if each bramble-spray
And mounded, gold-wreathed furze
Harebell and little thyme,
Were only hers;
As if this beauty and grace
Did to one bird belong,
And, at a flutter of wing,
Might vanish in song."

Mr. de la Mare, luckily, was not inspired to write war poems; but the poet's sense of horror at the martyrdom of mankind finds poignant expression in the piece called " The Marionettes "—

" Let the foul Scene proceed:
There's laughter in the wings;
'Tis sawdust that they bleed,
But a box Death brings.

* * * *

Gigantic dins uprise !
  Even the gods must feel
A smarting of the eyes
  As these fumes upsweal.

Strange, such a Piece is free,
  While we Spectators sit,
Aghast at its agony,
  Yet absorbed in it !

Dark is the outer air,
  Coldly the night draughts blow,
Mutely we stare and stare
  At the frenzied Show.

Yet heaven hath its quiet shroud
  Of deep, immutable blue—
We cry 'An end !' We are bowed
  By the dread, ''Tis true !' "

And so we are brought back again to the conclusion that it is men like Walter de la Mare, D. H. Lawrence, Siegfried Sassoon—men who have either shunned the War altogether in their verse or attacked it with an almost revolutionary fervour—who, since the death of Flecker and of Rupert Brooke, have alone kept alive the art of poetry in England.

The ardours of revolutionary idealism warm and fire the creative impulse like the ardours of romantic love. Perhaps the agonies from which the world is so slowly emerging will produce in England a new Shelley, a new and greater Byron, whose work will enshrine, not a frenzy of hatred and a desire for maniacal destruc-

tion, but a passion for a freer and nobler life in the new world which will be built up by the tireless hands of the young men of to-morrow, which will be cemented with the blood of the martyrs, of the despised and rejected pioneers of to-day. The ghastly absurdities of mutual murder can never—at this period of the world's history—be immortalised by the arts. Only the lyrical journalism of a corrupt and lying Press can properly occupy itself with the tinsel glories in which one of the greatest crimes yet committed by the Western races is sought to be wrapped up by those dark forces which were principally responsible for it.

All great art, in every country, must spring ultimately from the heart of the people. In the late War the peoples of Europe suffered a martyrdom almost without parallel in the world's history. Surely when the masses in every country become articulate—through the medium of the great poets, painters and dramatists who must inevitably arise—their utterances will be neither a slavish kissing of the rod, nor yet a slavish adulation of the social system which made their suffering possible.

And if we are to have a renaissance of poetry in England we must have a new criticism to meet it—a savage, rasping criticism, speaking with the bitter notes of an idealism which longs passionately for the best, and will no longer tolerate shams.

Criticism must once again become the task of those who have an uncompromising standard of values, of those whose love for what is real and sincere will not permit them to deal gently with what is false, pretentious, empty and ephemeral.

During the War we saw in England the mawkish theory that death on the field of battle automatically made a man a creditable poet, upheld by almost every critic of literature who wished to find a ready market for his wares. They could not, it seemed, do honour to the men who died without making themselves parties to a fraud. No doubt the ghoulish traffic in the verse exercises of dead schoolboys was an excellent business " proposition." No doubt some publishers—by bleeding the bereaved parents to pay for the production of their sons' pathetic little poems, or by gulling the public, with the aid of the sentimental reviewers and critics—managed to make a great deal of money out of it. But it is a damaging reflection on the influence of the War on the British reading public that it should have been a " stunt " which it was possible to work so blatantly.

AN OUTBURST ON GISSING

AN OUTBURST ON GISSING

"It is a terribly sad book, but oh, so true!" said an elderly lady of my acquaintance, when she came to the last page of George Gissing's *New Grub Street*. After I had finished the book myself—she pressed it upon me and would not be denied—I felt inclined, with certain reservations regarding its truth, to make the same comment. I know that I fled that evening to the nearest picture palace, in the hope that Chaplin would dispel from my mind this grisly vision of Victorian London. For exasperating as Gissing's stories are—and to me *New Grub Street* is the most exasperating of them all—they do succeed in conveying an impression of actuality. Gissing is a faithful recorder, but he does not understand what he sees, and the running commentary which he supplies is an agonising revelation of a starved soul with a warped outlook and a false sense of values. His portrait gallery of worms undoubtedly must have had living prototypes. He could not have invented such people out of his inner consciousness. But surely only a

Gissing could have thought of them as "heroes," or invited sympathy from his readers on their behalf!

No doubt, in the 'eighties and 'nineties of the last century, London contained any number of hard-up literary men, of high ideals and defective education, who bore the motto "please kick me" suspended round their servile necks. And to such men, as to Gissing himself, normal human beings—individuals with blood in their veins instead of diluted Stephens' ink—must have looked like villains. I must confess that it is the villains who are the only characters to whom Gissing introduces us who seem to me at all tolerable. The way they spurn and ill-treat his heroes and heroines is intensely sympathetic. Anybody with a spark of intelligence would do the same. Any woman worth her salt would fly from a nincompoop like Edwin Reardon, the hero of *New Grub Street*, in six weeks, not six years. She would fly from him because her good sense would urge her instinctively to revolt against the diseased vanity and egomania which underlay his deadly virtues.

The appeal to pity in Gissing's books is so repellent that the ordinary reader who comes to Gissing without any *parti-pris* can only suspect that self-pity—in the author—combined with a deficient sense of humour, are responsible for it.

Again and again Gissing asks you to admire some seedy clerk who studies masterpieces of literature in his attic, carries about with him that battered old stage property the "much-thumbed Horace," and yearns disastrously for higher things. Personally, as I read of his endeavours and ideals, his misfortunes, his wretched poverty and unsuccess, I feel growing up within me an awful desire to do him a mischief, and I hurry on impatiently till the flourishing and heartless villain does it for me. If I were an employer of a Gissing hero I should be tempted to sack him when he least expected it, out of sheer *méchanceté*. I should listen to his tragic outburst about his invalid wife and his eight starving children without a grain of pity; and end the interview by advising him curtly to take his family to the workhouse and himself with them.

And yet, after indulging in all these lively emotions, after hurling works by Gissing into the garden or out into the street, after stamping on them or using them as missiles, it is necessary to make acknowledgments. Characterless work arouses no emotions in the reader whatever. Perhaps it requires as much talent in a writer to make one really angry as to give one pleasure. If Gissing's people did not *live*—live in all their native beastliness, sham humility, lack of humour

and smarmsy fine feelings—one could not possibly get in such a rage either with him or them!

I remember on one occasion, when I was denouncing Gissing to a brother novelist, that he interrupted my flow of invective by reminding me of this truth. Gissing is not negligible: his books are social history, documents, detailed, relentless statements of lower-middle class life in what, in some respects, was one of the darkest ages in English social history. They are statements of fact drawn up by one who actually lived the life which he describes, dimly perceived its horror, but not having the imagination to enable him to escape from it himself, painted in pathetic colours the lives of men who similarly failed. The chief weakness of Gissing as an artist lies perhaps in this lack of imaginative insight. He seems to have been unable to perceive that his pathetic literary strugglers had only to pull themselves together, and to get on to their hind legs without appealing to fate to come along and help them, in order to be free. If a man is free within himself, he can laugh at the superficial servitude imposed upon him by economic circumstances. But Gissing's people are chained far more by their own idiotic sense of possession (the "little home," the "few choice books"), and by their Victorian respectability, than they are by their poverty. This patent fact never seems

to have occurred to Gissing himself, with the result that when he ceases merely to record, and throws the high lights of heroism on to his character's worst faults, he becomes a source of moral infection. A *cordon sanitaire* should be drawn round the admirers of Gissing's heroes. Such people are a danger to the community. To be a Gissing type is to be a plague-carrier; to admire one is, perhaps, even worse.

From the point of view of literary style, Gissing's writing has always seemed to me atrocious—as objectionable as the people and the life which he describes. His style is pretentious, pompous and illiterate. He rejoices in circumlocution, in the use of big, shoddy words where simple ones are ready to his pen. I remember a horrible passage in one of his lesser novels which describes a man going into his bedroom to change for dinner, in these terms: "He withdrew into his bedchamber for the purpose of attiring himself in the habiliments proper for the evening." When he came out again, one gathers that he was "attired" in "faultless evening dress." Perhaps the real pathos of Gissing's life is to be found in that word "habiliments"; but how is the precise flavour of it to be put into words? To say merely that his writing shows an ambition to be "genteel," implies a covert sneer which Gissing does not deserve. Perhaps he

was in some ways quite a simple man. But he over-rated certain things—" education " among them. No doubt in his passion for education (he was a precocious schoolboy) he became deeply learned, far more learned than many who have enjoyed greater advantages. (He says somewhere, " I had in me the making of a scholar. With leisure and tranquillity of mind, I should have amassed learning. Within the walls of a college I should have lived so happily, so harmlessly, my imagination ever busy with the old world . . .") Yet he seems to have valued mere learning for its own sake in a way impossible to any truly educated man. Perhaps the chief thing which " education " can do for the individual is to give him such a healthy contempt for education as an end that he is free to use it as a means. The really educated man can treat learning as a servant to the understanding, instead of valuing it, as Gissing did, for its own sake. Another thing which Gissing similarly over-rated is " social position." His writings reveal the lamentable fact that almost the only kind of Englishmen who can really despise class distinctions and get free from them are those whose social degree is marked in plain figures. Pathetically, over and over again, Gissing " loves a real gentleman."

His point of view towards learning, the learning

derived from books, is disclosed in his most popular work, *The Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft*, a volume which, for reasons that baffle me, is still beloved by an enormous number of readers. Here we see the poor, middle-aged student, spending the evening of his days in retirement, poring over his books, working in his garden, culling beautiful thoughts from the classics. What a charming picture! How perfectly sweet! Could Marcus Stone himself improve upon it? To me this book has a reek of corruption and decay; it smells fouler than a rotting corpse. Faugh! Better the twilight of the drunkard and the debauchee than this sentimental death-in-life. The spectacle conjured up of Henry Ryecroft in his library makes me want to throw open every door and window in the house. Perhaps the reason is that though I love the *contents* of good books, I am not a "bibliophile," and I detest libraries. To my mind a book which is a real book should send the reader back to life refreshed and stimulated, instead of providing him with a dusty funk-hole in which he can shelter from that mental struggle which ought to be perpetual between the cradle and the grave.

I suppose that Gissing's novels have been kept alive by their half-unconscious revelation of the world in which he lived, of the sort of influences

which moulded his mind. He knocked the lid off Pandora's box, so that to-day his readers' nostrils are appalled by the mixed odours of Victorian stuffiness which assail them as they turn the pages of his works. But interesting as the revelation is, it does not make Gissing a great novelist. His reputation is largely a factitious reputation, a truth which Mr. Frank Swinnerton himself, in his admirably impartial critical study of the author, is forced to allow his readers to infer.

THE AUTHOR OF 'TARR'

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It must, I suppose, have been towards the end of 1909 when Mr. Wyndham Lewis, in an artless Parisian disguise, penetrated into an editor's bathroom and read him the MS. of *The Pole*. The editor in question (Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer) printed *The Pole* with as little delay as possible, and very soon all the people in London who make it their business to talk about "a new voice," an "individual note," and so on, began busily to talk about its author. However, with a promising literary reputation already in the making, Mr. Lewis inconsiderately switched off his energies to his other art, and for some years his name ceased to appear in conjunction with his particular brand of ironic character study, and became linked, instead, with vivid decoration. Then *Blast* broke out, followed by the War—whether there was any connection between these two convulsions, I cannot attempt to say—and, to the alarm of some of his admirers, Mr. Lewis acquired the manifesto habit. We learned, however, about this time, that his

long silence did not mean that he had abandoned literature, but that all these years a great novel had been in progress. Sometimes portions of the MS. were lent to the faithful for an hour or two, then hurriedly recovered by the author for revision. I remember on one occasion being handed so much as a hundred pages, which I carried away in triumph, and began to read on the top of an omnibus, not knowing how soon they would be taken from me. Meanwhile, his early sketches, contributed to various periodicals such as *The English Review*, and to my own defunct magazine, had been collected together into a volume which had actually been made the subject of a contract. Positively, the book was to appear. But it did not appear, for the War destroyed the enterprising firm which had secured it.

The novel, however, was luckier. After its many revisions it was finally completed, and thanks to the courage of *The Egoist*, *Tarr* has at last seen the light.

To have waited for a novel for so many years, to have had one's interest so prodigiously aroused and then at long last to find the book in one's hand—elegantly printed on excellent paper, and sedately bound—was, it must be admitted, rather a strain on the nerves. The delays attending the birth of *Tarr* had the effect of putting an edge to

one's defensive weapons of criticism, and in 1918 it was certainly easier to examine it impartially than it might have been in 1914. Much water has run under the bridges in the past six years, and most of the daring innovations of pre-war days are already *vieux jeu*.

Mr. Lewis probably despises the novel as an art-form, and this may have led him to underestimate its difficulties, with the inevitable result that, although *Tarr* contains many delightful pages and several brilliantly-handled episodes, the general effect (I must confess it) seems to me unsatisfactory. As a novel it has two faults, of which the more unfortunate is its lack of contrast. The book, from beginning to end, is on one note, and this makes it a little difficult to read straight through. Its second defect is that the subject of the story is unworthy of the treatment. Mr. Lewis has the faculty of seeing things from an individual angle. He can turn his peculiar private searchlight on to human beings with surprising and often delicious results: and his particular vein of ironic humour is, so far as I know, unique in English literature. When one reads him one thinks of no one else, except occasionally of Jules Romains, or of Charles Louis Philippe. It is, therefore, doubly unfortunate that in *Tarr* he should have used his gifts to paint for us (and with what depressing

gusto !) only those scarcely human or completely sub-human waste products which before the War London used to segregate as far as possible in the Café Royal, and the rest of the world used to dump with indescribable relief in the Quartier Latin. The chief characteristic of the mass of detrimental humanity which inhabits—or used to inhabit—these two breeding grounds of the *fumiste* and the *poseur*, besides its purely animal licence, is its complacency and its addiction to what in small children is called "showing off." It is true that from time to time these rank swamps throw up to the surface a great painter or a great poet. But on his emergence into the world of men and women, with what haste he usually scrapes the dirt from himself !

The Café Royal (considered as an "art" centre merely) was first and foremost a home of sham originality. It was an alert cosmopolitan institution; it had plenty of flair for what was going to go, and it kept its eyes and ears open and scanned the artistic horizons of the world for "stunts" which it could profitably imitate. If a "new movement" was started on the Continent the Café Royal was always the first place to hear of it and to "produce" it in England. If a new genius appeared in Vienna or in Odessa or Seattle, the Café Royal scented him from afar, robbed him of

his secret, and hastily turned it into cash and kudos. Thus the crowd has come to believe that it was a spot from which new movements in art really sprang, whereas in point of fact it was only a centre from which they were exploited. For the truth is that revolutions in art or in anything else are but rarely accomplished by people who wear back-hair, purple shirts and passionate bow-ties—particularly in the present age. Nowadays genius no longer dresses the part, and is apt to be unsociable. The true pioneer is far more likely to be found living alone in a back room in some respectable suburban villa residence, with a glass of hot milk by his side, than disporting himself in public and destroying the coats of his stomach with absinthe or liqueurs. That the true artist and the monk have much in common must be obvious to a man of Mr. Lewis's intelligence; and since he is quite capable of seeing wherein lies the real romance of his subject, it is depressing to find his pictures of squalor and idiocy illuminated by no imaginative contrast.

Another reason why, in the popular mind, the Quartier Latin, the King's Road Chelsea, the Café Royal, and so on, are regarded as romantic spots, is probably because so many people have had an inexpensive debauch in those accommodating localities. But it is not the strayed reveller

or the sentimental traveller who is really characteristic of them. And it is, alas, from their *permanent* population—the essential Café-Royalist, the *indigène* of the Quartier—that Mr. Lewis has exclusively chosen his characters. One marvels at his interest in them; but though he has drawn them all for us with extraordinary skill and insight, it is not easy to share this interest. There are moments also when he seems unable to take a detached view of his creations, when he takes them seriously. About the pretentious Tarr he sometimes even writes pretentiously; and there are times when he sinks into describing his menagerie of vociferously clever eccentrics in a vociferously clever and eccentric prose.

The story opens in Paris, in the Boulevard du Paradis, with a meeting between Tarr (described in the Prologue as "one of the showmen of the author") and a walking cock-shy named Hobson. "This was Alan Hobson's outfit—a Cambridge cut disfigured his originally manly and melodramatic form. His father was a wealthy merchant somewhere in Egypt. He was very athletic, and his dark and cavernous features had been constructed by nature as a lurking-place for villainies and passions. He was untrue to his rascally, sinuous body. He slouched and ambled along, neglecting his muscles, and his dastardly face attempted to portray delicacies of common sense

and gossamer-like backslidings into the inane that would have puzzled a bile-specialist. He would occasionally exploit his blackguardly appearance and blacksmith muscles for a short time, however. And his strong, piercing laugh threw A.B.C. waitresses into confusion. The art-touch, the Bloomsbury stain, was very observable. Hobson's Harris tweeds were shabby. A hat suggesting that his ancestors had been Plainsmen, or some rough, sunny folk, shaded unnecessarily his countenance, already far from open."

Into the ears of this detested acquaintance, Tarr pours, capriciously, a violent manifesto on the subject of sex and the artist.

"Sex is a monstrosity. It is the arch abortion of this filthy universe. How 'old-fashioned'—eh, my fashionable friend? We are all optimists to-day, aren't we? God's in His Heaven, all's well with the world! I am a pessimist, Hobson. But I'm a new sort of pessimist. I think I am the sort that will please! I am the Panurgic-pessimist, drunken with the laughing gas of the abyss. I gaze on squalor and idiocy, and the more I see it, the more I like it. Flaubert built up his *Bouvard et Pécuchet* with maniacal and tireless hands. It took him ten years. That is a long draught of stodgy laughter from the gases that rise from the dung-heap?"

When Tarr has finished discussing his theories

about sex with Hobson, he proceeds, during the remainder of the book, to put them into practice. The result is disappointing. In sexual matters Tarr is a commonplace sort of dog for all his tall talk. If he were really the kind of character the author would have us believe him to be, he could never have tolerated playing the lead in such a worthless company. This cosmopolitan art coterie in which Tarr (who, in spite of his protestations, is at heart as much a Café-Royalist as the cheapest of them) is not ashamed to move and have his being, consists of his German fiancée, Bertha Lunken, a comic cad named Kreisler, Anastasya Vasek, a Russian-American-German lady of an ample freedom of person and deportment, and a number of subsidiary *rapins* of both sexes. With this material it is only fair to say that the author does wonders. The story jerks itself forward in a series of episodes, some of which, in their particular vein, are beyond praise. The details, for example, of Tarr's typically English " furious quarrel " with Kreisler are described inimitably. The quarrel is merely an indulgence in comedy-drama on Tarr's part. At bottom his detachment is complete, and he plunges into the fight under the stimulus not of hatred, but of his native humour, for emotional diversion. The episode of Kreisler's appearance at the Bonnington Club, *sans frac*, of the duel with

Soltyk, and of Tarr's *affaire* with Anastasya Vasek, are all so excellently done that one wishes they could be detached from the book and served up separately. Some one ought to take *Tarr* and make an anthology of its best passages, scrapping the manifesto element. For it is in his manifestoes and pronouncements on art and life, in his sententious "Prologue" and "Epilogue," that Mr. Lewis's talent is most obscured by Café-Royalism. In the domain of ideas he is not a genuine innovator or revolutionary: he has no real depth. Unlike Mr. Joyce and Mr. D. H. Lawrence, his thought seems not to be rooted in any national soil, nor is it inspired by any religious experience. His generalisations have thus at times an air of insincerity and clap-trap, of being addressed to the gallery. On the character of his degenerate Kreisler he bases the reflection that "Preparations for outbursts of potential rudeness form a part of the training of a German." (One can see this being quoted with gusto in the evening papers.) He even explains that Kreisler, in the book, is a "German, and nothing else," which is about as illuminating as saying that Crippen was a typical Englishman—"the" Englishman, in fact. And his comments on Nietzsche can only be based on the assumption that none of the readers of *Tarr* will have absorbed a line of that writer.

However, it is perhaps not fair to dwell on the occasional lapses from his own standard of an author who, at his best—as in a number of passages in *Tarr*, and also in various sketches contributed in the past to *The English Review*, and more recently to *The Little Review*—comes so close to genius as Mr. Lewis. The good things in *Tarr* make the book more worth buying than ninety out of every hundred of the novels which have made their appearance in the last ten years. The qualities of Mr. Lewis's prose bear the impress of personality, and are peculiar to himself. He is a master of irony; and he sees with his own eyes.

THE GORDON SELFRIDGE OF ENGLISH LETTERS

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Although the revelation of those regular methods of industry by which Anthony Trollope composed his admirable works may have shocked some of our minor poets, his example has, nevertheless, been followed by many of our most distinguished and most highly appreciated writers. For we live in a strenuous and methodical age. Pelmanism has pitilessly regulated our minds, militarism has drilled our muscles; the velvet jacket of a bygone Bohemianism has worn itself to shreds and been relegated to the dustbin. Our modern authors no longer patiently await their moments of inspiration, amid conducive surroundings. The muse is forced to bestir herself through the energies and importunities of a generation of novelists who will not wait a moment. They cannot wait: neither their publishers nor their public will let them.

To achieve success in the profession of letters, it is necessary to-day not only to have an enormous

output, but also to maintain a high general level. Thus it follows that it is only the men in the hardest mental condition—those who possess the tidiest and the best-regulated brains—who reach the summits of prosperity and stay there, for they alone can stand the strain.

The work produced in this competitive commercial manner, though it may lack depth and charm, nevertheless tends to have qualities of clearness, technical efficiency and force which are by no means to be despised. In England the foundations of the contemporary novel are, as a rule, more solidly laid than was the case with the novel of the Victorian era. In the best of our current fiction there is usually a definite architectural plan, and a scheme of idea-decoration carefully designed in accordance with the latest modes. On the other hand, those uncensored flights of fancy which posterity so often describes as genius tend to be climinated from it. Imagination often deserts it—together with much that is strange, fantastic, magical and unexpected—and invention, which is a so much more reliable quality, is exalted in its place. Not even Pelmanism can guarantee the happy accident. In a word, the commercially efficient author cannot have it both ways, and the work of no contemporary English writer shows this more clearly than that of Mr. Arnold Bennett.

Among the many big business men which the profession of letters has produced in England during the past two decades, Mr. Bennett must in many ways be considered the most successful. He is the best all-round man we have—the Gordon Selfridge of the profession—a veritable universal provider of literary "merchandise." When we consider the number and the variety of the things which he has done, and done efficiently, it is impossible to withhold from him the most ungrudging admiration. He is a marvel, a prodigy of organisation, energy and driving power. His annual total of "words" must be prodigious. He pours out plays, novels, little books of homely advice—how to live on twenty-four hours a day, how to attain success in literature—comments on men and things, political journalism, criticism, even an occasional poem, with inexhaustible profusion.

As a journalist he is always topical, always in touch with the latest movement but one, and conversant with very nearly the newest idea. And he has mastered words so thoroughly that he can make them express almost anything he pleases. As a rule, his pleasure consists in punching his readers hard, in a not too vulnerable spot; and he rarely fails to achieve his end. If the notes in some weekly review strike you so forcibly that you are startled out of your post-prandial nap at

your club, ten to one they were dashed off by Mr. Bennett in his bath. (Every moment in the life of a business author must be made productive.) Mr. Bennett's fountain pen is a fountain which never runs dry, and all his literary products are "good selling lines," certain to please a "high-class public," guaranteed to be of superior quality. With what emotion must the world of publishers regard this man, who never lets them down, who during long years has proved himself the acme of reliability! If some American Dollar Combine had occasion to commission, say, an epic in twelve cantos on "Liberty" or a concise cyclopædia of literature, to be delivered in a fortnight, to whom could it address itself with more confidence than to Mr. Bennett? If he agreed to their proposal, and accepted their terms, there would not be the smallest doubt that (*force majeure* excepted) the epic or the cyclopedia would be delivered on the appointed day, and would be found a sound and serviceable piece of work.

An examination of Mr. Bennett's output shows that his literary goods fulfil all the requirements of a commercial age. It is only when we judge his work by standards which have nothing to do with commerce, success, or circulation that it is possible to find a flaw in it or to temper our admiration with a word of criticism. And yet, when all

is said, it is not the function of the critic to bother his head about a writer's obscurity or his renown, or, indeed, about his personality at all, as it exists outside his books. His task is to apply the acid to the proffered metal with a pawnbroker's precision and a pawnbroker's absence of false sentiment. The fact that Mr. Bennett has a great reputation, that his books sell like hot cakes, that his plays run for months, that he is (or was) the political associate of Lord Beaverbrook, cannot be allowed in any way to influence the judgment of any one urged towards criticism by a disinterested love of letters. The only things about Mr. Bennett with which the critic can concern himself are the printed books which bear his name.

The task of assigning to Mr. Bennett his rightful position in modern English creative literature has been to a large extent facilitated by himself. He has classified for us the long list of his publications which appear on the fly-leaves of his books. The shockers or "fantasias"—admirable of their kind—form a separate group which must not be confounded with his more solid and serious fictions. Similarly, his books of essays and belles-lettres are in a class by themselves. If, putting on one side his minor literary activities, we consider only those novels to which Mr. Bennett himself attaches importance, we shall be able to trace our author's

artistic development, and to arrive at an estimate, without doing him injustice.

In Mr. Bennett's earliest novels we can discern the talented young provincial beginning his literary career, with the roots of his being deep in the soil of his Five Towns. In these first efforts he is sincere if a shade pretentious, a little crude in the matter of technique, but on the whole an honest photographer of the men and women he understands best in the setting most familiar to him. There follows, perhaps, a period of soaring personal ambition, of eager getting on. We guess that Mr. Bennett has established himself in London; and from London it is but a step to Paris, that paradise of the clever English provincial dissatisfied with his environment, that disastrous finishing school for second-rate minds. Mr. Bennett (to judge entirely from his books) got Paris badly; but it had the effect of putting an edge on his technique. When, in the literary sense, he returned to his native province, he did so with a new power of presentation, a new detachment, and a clearer sense of values.

His *conte*, *The Matador of the Five Towns*, a masterpiece in its genre, and perhaps the most perfect piece of work its author has ever written, owes a great deal to French influence. And the same can be said of those laborious novels of provincial life, minutely observed and built up

with the tireless hands of a man of character and determination, on which his reputation principally rests. *The Old Wives' Tale*, the publication of which marks a turning-point in Mr. Bennett's career, could not have been written if the author had not been saturated in the literature of France. In France the lesson of Flaubert's life survives as a sacred tradition—the lesson of taking pains. But if *The Old Wives' Tale* established Mr. Bennett's position among our foremost novelists—established him not, perhaps, as a master, but in any case as one of the most brilliant second-rate minds which England has produced in the present century—it seems, by clinching his commercial prosperity, to have begun the insidious process of cutting him off from the most valuable sources of his inspiration. After *Clayhanger* and *Hilda Lessways*, the Five Towns in Mr. Bennett's novels have grown fainter. There are signs in his books that he has returned from Paris to London, to receive the reward of his success and to consolidate his triumph. He now has "a public," a large, hungry, devouring public. And perhaps this public is growing a little weary of the Potteries? The public of a popular novelist must never be allowed to grow weary! For one reason or another, Mr. Bennett, in his latest novels, gives me the impression that he is concerned to prove, almost in a mood of irritation, that he is *not a provincial*. He insists on the point in the

novels of his decline—*The Lion's Share*, etc.—with the same energy that he insists on the excellence of his taste in literature, music, architecture, painting and the fine arts. His old "regionalist" literary accent, shared with Thomas Hardy, Eden Phillpotts and others, is now scarcely to be traced in his writings. The strong flavour has gone out of them. Mr. Bennett has torn himself up by the roots, and his later novels, instead of being imaginative interpretations of a kind of life of which he has an intimate and instinctive understanding, tend to be based on the news, to be "topical." Evidently these new developments have exactly hit the public taste, as presumably they were intended to do; and no doubt his sales increase in proportion as the real value of his work declines.

In none of his books is the later Arnold Bennett more clearly displayed than in his topical and immensely successful war novel, *The Pretty Lady*. With what admirable commercial astuteness have the ingredients of this book been mixed! First of all we have the "over-age" hero. (The War period saw the apotheosis of the well-preserved man of fifty.) Then there is the inevitable Parisian flavouring; but in this instance Paris is brought to Leicester Square in the person of the smart *cocotte* who gives the book its title. (Mr. Bennett has coined money out of Paris for many years,

and presumably realises that the Paris of the English and American tourist will not for a long time lose its attractions for the average circulating library subscriber.) But it was not easy to get to Paris during the War if you were a mere civilian, so Mr. Bennett, for a change, obligingly brought Paris to London. All the other ingredients of the story are equally fetching. There is an air raid brilliantly described, a dash of war-time "other-worldliness," a little (not too dangerous) sarcasm about the running of the War, many London social echoes, glimpses of war charities and of the smart people who amused themselves by pretending to run them. Even the stars in their courses seemed to work in Mr. Bennett's favour. To crown everything, his publisher, when the book appeared, was able to advertise it in connection with that now forgotten scandal, the English *maison tolérée* at Cayeux, with which, of course, it had nothing whatever to do.

The Pretty Lady is from many points of view an extraordinarily clever novel, but its basic insincerities are numerous and visible. In no case has the thing created taken on a life of its own and forced the hand of its creator. Mr. Bennett, one suspects, nowadays never writes what his artistic conscience tells him is the truth, because he *must*, without regard to the susceptibilities of his readers and of the libraries. He has his eye on

his public steadily the whole time; and he has his conscience as a writer safely in a strait-jacket. He knows exactly what will "go down," and resolutely expunges what may not go down. In a word, he plays for safety.

With *The Roll Call*, that dismal re-exploration of old emotions lightened by modern war experiences—which was duly hailed on its appearance as Mr. Bennett's *chef d'œuvre*—his decadence in his character of artist may be said to have reached its nadir. When a writer works too energetically to recapture the enthusiasms of yesterday, to revive dead thrills, to live intellectually in his own past, then we begin to fear that the future holds no more for him. Mr. Bennett seems to have reached this point. One cannot imagine that he will ever write a worse novel than *The Roll Call*. After this book one can no longer hope that his great talent will ever reach a point so near genius as it reached in *The Matador of the Five Towns* and *The Old Wives' Tale*. If it were not for these two beautiful works of art, no one could reproach the author for his subsequent short comings. But of writers who, like Mr. Bennett, have shown themselves capable of so much, more is expected than the mere manufacture of literary merchandise, designed not to satisfy the author's artistic conscience, but to suit his market.

REDDING 'ON WINES'

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It is surely a lamentable thing that the love of wine for its own sake which seems to have characterised the Victorian era should now have become so rare among Englishmen. No longer (as in the 'sixties) does the family solicitor feel it incumbent on him to mitigate the aridity of his documents by offering his client a glass of port wine. No longer does a sojourn at one of the Universities provide our young men, if not with an education, at all events with an educated palate. The old sherries have almost disappeared, the port which comes to us nowadays has deteriorated to the same extent as our discrimination; nor is taste in clarets and in burgundies what it was. Drinking, in short, is ceasing with us to be an art, and is becoming every day a cruder appetite. Perhaps it is that as a nation we are becoming too much imbued with ideas of getting on or getting out, of getting things done and doing them *now*. When we drink we expect something to happen, or else we want our money back. We

drink for results; it is only the effect which matters. Our ideas seem to have reduced themselves to the simple formula that champagne is undoubtedly the best way of "getting there" if you can afford it, but that whisky will do well enough if you can't.

The true wine drinker, the man who regards good wine as "poetry in solution," and feels for it that romantic regard which occasionally inspired our grandfathers, is become one of the rarest kinds of connoisseur that exist among us. We often encounter individuals who collect postage stamps, and, still more often, men who haunt sale-rooms and antique shops to display their *expertise* over pictures or old china; while as for those to whom second-hand book catalogues are the favourite form of literature, they are an immense class. But I wonder how many people there are left who keep a copy of Redding *On Wines* in their dining-rooms, and whose favourite diversion is the examination of a long and complicated wine-list? In the 'fifties the study of Cyrus Redding's learned treatise was so much a part of a gentleman's education that the volume found its way into Bohn's Library, and went into several editions in that august series. Now, alas, it is a familiar denizen of the sixpenny barrow.

That there are a few left among us who preserve

the old tradition goes without saying, and perhaps they make up in enthusiasm what they lack in numbers. Of my personal acquaintances I can recall perhaps half a dozen devotees, of whom the most remarkable was an Oxonian poet, who had the reputation of being the most distinguished classical scholar of his year. He was a man of the most refined susceptibilities; nevertheless, I remember that he habitually faced the startling decorations of the Trocadero Restaurant merely for the pleasure which it gave him to turn over the pages of its gigantic *Carte des Vins*. Another friend had an exotic Soho acquaintance "in the trade," from whom he procured those humble wines of the people which used to be imported to give Italians, exiled in London, the illusion of home. To my friend, I suppose, they gave the illusion of travel.

I imagine the true wine lovers of to-day as an austere and temperate body of men (far more temperate, indeed, than most teetotallers); impecunious; lovers of the sun; addicted to foreign travel; yet, to a man, claiming France as their only real *seconde patrie*.

Foreign travel being still, for the moment, made difficult by passport restrictions, the devotees who remain at home are thrown back on wine merchants' remnants and on chance discoveries in shops.

With them hunting for cheap yet drinkable wine is become a pastime, like hunting for Longton Hall figures or for first editions; and the difficulties of the search are increasing daily. Nevertheless, discoveries—since our cellars even now must contain some millions of uncorked bottles, and every unopened wine bottle is an adventure—are still to be made by those who persevere.

The unearthing, in a sleepy provincial town, of a bottle of Liebfraumilch for the sum of three-and-sixpence, recently filled a friend of mine with elation for an entire week. He carried his bottle home as tenderly and reverently as if it were a Waterford decanter. Another acquaintance, visiting a still sleepier town, came on a whole *cache* of golden Montrachet at its original price.

No such good fortune has, alas! come my own way; but among the minor consolations of collecting I reckon the discovery of a "Touraine Supérieure," in a hock-shaped bottle, for the modest sum of half-a-crown. It was not a "selling line," and its original roughness had accordingly been toned down by some years of repose in the wine merchant's vaults. I suppose its name did not convey very much to the ordinary purchaser of Beaunes and St. Juliens; but to me it brought delicious memories of white wines drunk on the banks of the Loire in the golden evenings of a far distant June—

memories of Pouilly and of Vouvray, where the wines are so different from the acrid filth which is all that seems to be left over for the inhabitants of Saumur. When I got my bottle home and sipped it at dinner, the flavour of the wine reminded me of Vouvray. And who would not like to be reminded of Vouvray, gentlest and most tranquil of the little towns of France?

I feel sure there must be many people who share my perhaps childish pleasure in reading the names on wine bottles. There must be others to whom, for example, the word Nuits suggests at once that little wayside station which the Marseilles *rapide* passes on its upward climb into the mountains of the Côte d'Or; whom the word Macon afflicts with a certain reminiscent dreariness; to whom Barsac has an intimate and sunny connotation, recalling memories of a cheerful little town on the banks of the Garonne, where life was once so easy and the sky so blue.

The average French taste in wines, as I recall it, differs considerably from the taste of the average Englishman. I remember in a score of small inns up and down France finding in each, as the *pièce de résistance* on the wine-list, a sweet (and to me) indigestible Sauterne. I am no lover of Sauternes. Of the bottles of this wine which I have helped to empty I recall none with enthusiasm. Not so

Chablis-Moutonne, Graves, Meursault, Pouilly. At Gien, on the Loire, I once drank a bottle of old Pouilly with a friendly innkeeper, the smoothness and fragrance of which still linger in my memory. We sat at a round iron table outside the hotel. Beyond the double row of trees was the stone parapet which enclosed the treacherous, swift-flowing river; and in the distance, on the opposite bank, a white house gleamed ghostly in the moonlight. When my innkeeper was a boy he had fired from the window of that house against the Prussians. "They are afraid of us now," he remarked truculently. "The next time we shall beat them, sure enough!" How peaceful it seemed to be sitting like that in the still night, the sky above us deepest blue and powdered with stars like diamond sparks, the huge river swirling down towards the sea, a yard or two from the table on which reposed the bottle and our glasses!

Another French wine for which I have always had an affection is Chablis-Moutonne. I recall a bottle drunk at *déjeuner* at the Café de l'Embarcadère at St. Germain, on a hot summer morning, whose golden smoothness must have made even the gods envious. In the sunshine afterwards, walking along that terrace which overlooks the Seine, one felt (I remember) not unlike a rather dissipated god, and at four in the afternoon the

idea of a good strong English cup of tea was far from displeasing.

But of all the wines which I ever tasted in France, the most unique, the most unforgettable, was a bottle of ancient Graves unearthed for me from the cellars of the Hôtel des Ruines at Coucy le Château. It was on Easter Eve in 1914. Throughout Holy Week that year the weather was damp and cold, and I remember distinctly feeling the presage of coming calamity as I travelled by gradual stages from Calais to Lille, and from Lille—passing through Arras and St. Quentin—to Laon and Coucy. It was late on a frosty evening when I reached Laon—that treasure of a town, perched on its abrupt hill. The picture which it presented, with its streets of old houses with pointed roofs, its frowsy inimitable inns, and its two glorious churches—the whole place surrounded by moss-grown ramparts and illuminated by a cold and impassive moon—remains engraved on my memory. But I drank no wine at Laon that was worth recalling. The supreme adventure of that journey awaited me at Coucy.

I think it must have been the peculiar melancholy of Coucy, under a grey sky, which made me so reckless. The treasure stood at the end of the wine-list, the dearest wine in the house with the exception of the Champagnes. It called itself

modestly "Graves"—name usually associated in English minds with the eighteenpenny poison sold in pre-war days by the nearest grocer. I asked the *patron* about it, but he seemed annoyed. He suggested the inevitable Sauterne. I asked him if the Graves was not a good wine? This was too much for his honesty. He confessed, with ill-humour, that it was magnificent; then with a sigh went off to the cellar in person to procure it. It was in an ancient dark red bottle, covered with cobwebs, and embossed with an heraldic seal. The *patron* handled it in the peculiar way which the wine drinker immediately recognises. The uncorking became an event of ceremony. The *patronne* emerged from her retreat and hovered. The two waiters turned away from duller occupations and stood like elderly acolytes while the *patron* himself seized the corkscrew, wiped the neck of the bottle and laid it in its little basket with the tenderness of a mother laying her child in its cot. When the first drop from the glass was caressing my palate all was understood, all forgiven. The yielding of the bottle appeared as an act of personal kindness, which it was presumptuous to have asked of mine host on the strength of so short an acquaintance. I wondered how he could possibly have held my paltry seven francs one-half so precious as the thing he sold. On the following evening it did not seem

fair to demand another bottle, but I was constrained to ask how many more bottles of this wine of wines remained in the cellar. There were six more; and I promised myself that I would come back again to Coucy and drink them up. Among the many minor exasperations of the War, the thought of German officers swilling all that liquid poetry, in one orgiastic night, was to me not the least.

So much more pleasure is (to my mind) to be got from drinking wine than from absorbing Peace beer, or, what is still worse, Peace whisky, that I cannot help wondering why it is that wine-drinking has not come back more definitely into favour with the English public.

There are still, in the wine merchants' cellars, quite a number of little known wines waiting to be rediscovered. The once rejected Madeiras and Marsalas and Riojas will be found by the explorer to be not without merit; and some of the wines of Austria and Hungary may safely be ventured on. (If popular feeling runs high it is always possible to wash off the label.) Not all experiments, naturally, will end in success. Dismal disappointments will be encountered frequently enough, even by the enthusiast with experience. But no man of taste should be deterred from adventure—no, not even by the corrosive horrors of cheap Carlowitz.

The charm of wine is something quite distinct from alcoholic stimulation, which can be obtained more easily by other means. Something of the genius of the place it comes from manages to get into it. (Perhaps it is for this reason, because Australia has no attractions for me, that I personally would prefer to drink almost any European *vin ordinaire* than the best Australian burgundy.) Wine, to-day more than ever, helps to bring a little warmth and gaiety and friendliness to our social occasions. Its use in moderation (and the real wine-lover is incapable of drinking to excess) seems to me to form a part of that art of living which our French neighbours understand so much better than we do. At the risk of being sandbagged by some indignant Pussyfoot I must confess my sympathy with the ancient tag—Boileau is it, or Boufflers?—

> "Allez vieux fous, allez apprendre à boire.
> On est savant quand on boit bien;
> Qui ne sait boire, ne sait rien."

CLEVER NOVELS

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During the period when our intellectuals were suffering from their first attack of Freud-fever, I remember attending a lion party which had been convoked by a lady from Girton. Several school-marms of the most advanced type formed the audience, and the principal lion was an Irish novelist and poet—one of the wittiest and most fluent talkers I have ever met. The conversation was directed ruthlessly towards psycho-analysis by one of the school-marms who, dressed in beads and Djibbah, sat on a cushion on the floor and gazed at the poet with eyes full of yearning. The Irishman was fully equal to the occasion. He seized the ball of conversation, threw it into the air, caught it, played with it. He held every one's attention, and negotiated every awkward corner with an ease which simply took one's breath away. The yearner, I could see, was struggling to memorise each word. . . . After a while, giving the audience a chance to prattle and himself to get his breath, he turned to me with a broad grin and whispered, "My God,

what in Hell's name is psycho-analysis ! " Another instant and he was back again, and roared steadily for the rest of the evening. The school-marms were enchanted !

I was reminded of that intense lady dressed in her Djibbah and adorned by " peasant art " when I read Miss Clemence Dane's *Legend*. The group of female writers to whom (with admirable skill) Miss Dane introduces us all exhale a curious aroma of the girl's high school. They yearn; they take " their art " with extreme seriousness; they talk about it and about one another with a breathless sense of their importance. But for the lady in the Djibbah I should have considered them as hopelessly incredible; now I am impelled to believe that Miss Dane is writing from a wealth of experience which I do not envy her.

During the past twelve years, in one way or another, I suppose I have seen something of as many different sets and circles in literary London as most writers. I have been to innumerable Evenings, even to some given by distinguished lady novelists. But, dull as they were, none of them, thank Heaven ! remotely resembled the Evening described by Miss Dane. The parties given by the most distinguished woman writer of my acquaintance were quite aggressively unliterary. Butterflies from Mayfair (or perhaps from Bays-

water) made up the bulk of the guests, though there was, of course, a fringe of distinguished dull dogs who wrote books. Mr. H. G. Wells was always "coming on later"; and, rather sympathetically, never came. We ate at the appointed time, drank, smoked and gossiped; and it wasn't, as far as I can recall, "literary" gossip either. If we indulged in any mutual admiration, we certainly didn't display it: and even if Mr. H. G. Wells *had* arrived I don't suppose any writer in the room would have moved an eyelid. (The party I am thinking of glittered as regards "names": apart from the butterflies, I think I was the most unknown person present.) In the lower literary altitudes, particularly those frequented by the kind of person whom Miss Dane has thus deliciously described—"He sat on the floor, and he called you 'dear lady,' and sometimes he would take hold of your watch-chain and finger it as he talked to you. But he was awfully clever, I believe. He wrote reviews and very difficult poetry that didn't rhyme"—I have always found the conversation much more professional. People who "write reviews," in particular, often put on conversational airs impossible to a Thomas Hardy, a Conrad or a D. H. Lawrence. Often they simply pulverise the poor devils who drain their heart's blood to provide them with their raw material. And they use incredibly long

words! But even in these circles I have never met with anything approaching the curious group-feeling which Miss Dane describes, with anything like the rapturous self-absorption of her characters. I never found a party of men and women who "talked until dawn"; I never knew an author who "wrote all night," though I have known many who (with more sense) danced all night whenever the opportunity presented itself. And I never heard of any woman writer who, dying at twenty-six, was considered worthy—by a publisher—of a long and detailed biography, however ably done. In this part of Miss Dane's story, and it is one of the principal points in her plot, I decline absolutely to believe. Her people, however, I take on trust. The sexual inhibitions common to over-educated Englishwomen lead to the queerest results, to the strangest warping of character and mind. Miss Dane has studied the outer manifestations of this branch of feminine psychology so carefully that she makes her characters live, and even succeeds in making them interesting, though the interest is to a large extent pathological. But to have made a book about "literary people" interesting at all, is in itself a remarkable achievement. She has done it by analysing the spites, the secret vanities and hungers in warped female hearts, and her method is perhaps the best there is for portraying

an author as a human being. A writer is never so much a man and a brother (or a woman and a sister) as when he (or she) is behaving like a toad. His spites are usually concealed; his other emotions displayed and exploited. The inexorable impulse of production forces him to turn them into "copy," and thus, in a sense, to deflower his own personality. It is this fact which renders all the more deplorable the rage now prevailing among writers of clever novels for filling their canvases with life-size portraits of clever novelists. For clever novelists, in the flesh, are as a rule more depressing even than their works. These unfortunates, when seen herded together in a London club, or collected in a London drawing-room, always remind me of sufferers from some incurable malady. Something—their load of culture, perhaps—seems to oppress them and imprison them; they resemble fish struggling helplessly in a net from which there is no hope of their ever being able to extricate themselves. They cannot—or so it appears—escape from the society of their own kind. They are imprisoned in their particular literary clique, and the result of this imprisonment is disastrous. In a really smart highbrow novel, for example in the later books of Gilbert Cannan, Mr. J. Middleton Murry's *Still Life* and Miss Romer Wilson's *If All These Young Men*, we meet over and over again members of the same

dreary set viewed from different standpoints and described by talents of varying efficiency. The bloom, alas, has been rubbed off these characters, in the same way that it has been rubbed off the picture-postcard belle, after her thousandth appearance in *The Tatler;* and one realises that the "art" person can be very nearly as tiresome as "art" furniture or an "art" cottage. When I try to read novels like Mr. Murry's *Still Life*, I like to remember King George II, that lovable character who didn't like "boetry" and didn't like "bainting"; and had no hesitation in saying so. Mr. Murry deploys his culture rather aggressively. You guess he has "swotted up literature"; and even on page one you divine that laboured last word on Dostoieffsky. His heavy load of reading gives his work a portentousness which (for me, at any rate) renders it almost unreadable; so that I never persevered to the end with *Still Life* or discovered what eventually happened to his familiar characters—characters who, in one disguise or another, make up the middle-class literary world as we all, alas, know it.

Miss Romer Wilson has more imagination than Mr. Murry and a more vigorous talent. She started admirably with her *Martin Schüler*, poked her head for a moment out of the soup tureen, saw a live human being and described him. But having

thus written one brilliant book, the admiration of her fellow intellectuals appears to have been too much for her. They seem to have dragged her down from her point of vantage, with the result that in her second novel she has done little but report their conversations. She has done it with a certain acidity, a sympathetic dreariness. The conversations are perhaps new to her; but at least she is quick enough to divine that to some of her readers they may be as stale as last month's newspapers. So she has tried to give them a new turn, to dish them up in a new way. But it is no use: it is the same cold mutton. Every nook and corner of the minds of her clever friends has long ago been explored and their contents exploited by their clever enemies. But there is hope for Miss Wilson; for traces of her disgust are noticeable on every page of *If All These Young Men.* She will escape yet into the open, and find queer people who (though, perhaps, they drop their aitches) are too big for patronage and too acrid to serve up as "perfect dears."

Mr. Cannan, alas, seems now permanently to have ensconced himself in the deepest armchair in that curious cock-and-hen club which to-day takes the place of "Bohemia." Nowadays when he publishes a new novel one knows in advance that "every one" will be in it: and every one always is. The few

additions from the outer world in his recent photograph albums have been some comic Jews and an utterly unconvincing prostitute. Clever as he is, he does not seem to realise that for people of normal intelligence the prostitute is absolutely the dullest type of human being on which a novelist can use his talent. From the romantic standpoint, the prostitute has been found out. She is utterly *passée de mode*. The details of her career should be set out in Blue Books for the edification of sociologists. Even the realist has no excuse for not avoiding her : she is not real. The same objection—that they are not real people—applies to what used to be known, in far-off days, as the " smart set." These sub-human types come in still for an enormous amount of attention from clever novelists with anæmic imaginations. A recent example is to be found in a novel called *Richard Kurt*, by Stephen Hudson, which describes in agonising detail the lecheries of a set of futile cads of both sexes, in whose doings no sane person could be interested.

Perhaps it is the chief defect of the clever novelists that they cannot appreciate personality, will not look for it under the masks which nowadays are worn in the same way that the animals put on protective colouring. Up till the middle of the last century personality was marked in plain enough

figures. Idiosyncracy was carried to extreme, human beings blossomed as extravagantly as flowers in a favourable soil, and the flavour of these rich personalities could be conveyed to paper by writers who were not necessarily men of genius. How much more vivid, and, from the point of view of psychology, how much more enthralling is many a volume of eighteenth-century memoirs than the average clever novel of to-day! In an age when nearly everybody wears the same kind of hat, and lives in fear of his neighbours, exceptional human beings require discovery. They must be sought for; the masks must be torn from their faces; the varnish must be scratched away. But if we dig down deep enough we can find the same degree of human interest in our contemporaries as in their predecessors. Marat, Gilles de Retz, Casanova, Benvenuto, Jeanne d'Arc, Robespierre, Elizabeth Chudleigh are all present with us could we but recognise them when we meet them in the Tube. The romantic creations of a Gautier or a Mérimée are far truer to life—to life that *is* life—than all the clever little people in the clever little books of Mr. Murry, Miss Wilson and their myriad competitors. The most fantastic conceptions of the romantics come closer to essential truth than do the photographs taken by so many of our modern novelists of persons who, though possessed of speech, and

dressed like men and women, are nothing but human automata. Things have come to such a pass that if any of the characters who have left their mark on the history of the world were to be accurately portrayed in a novel, the book would be damned by the critics on the score of its grotesque improbability. And if any of the figures who are leaving their mark on the world in the present year of grace were to be described in their habits as they live, with the thoughts they actually think attributed to them, the author would almost certainly be put in gaol.

It is precisely in their courage and originality in the choice of material for their stories, and in the wide range of their imagination, that genius and commercial success meet on common ground. The "clever novel" gets the long notices in the weekly reviews; but Miss Marie Corelli, Mr. Robert Hichens, and Miss Edith M. Dell rake in the shekels. It is only when a clever novelist escapes from the influence of whatever coterie he graces, that he begins to make money. Mr. Alec Waugh's schoolboys are fresh ground, and so also are Mr. Evans' Welsh peasants and Mr. Thomas Burke's denizens of China Town—hence their popularity. Mr. W. L. George is another successful writer who has kept free from the coteries. By his passionate interest in the political and social

ideas which are absorbing the attention of his fellow-men, he has shown that a novelist may also be a good citizen and play a valuable part in the life of the community. Miss Rebecca West has most of the clever novelist's defects; but she, too, has looked out of the club windows. In *The Return of the Soldier*, despite the inherent vulgarity of her style, and of her point of view towards " the servants," she has written a readable story, because she has managed to escape the snare of writing about writers and the people whom writers know. She got away from the " set and clique " atmosphere and gave her imagination its chance. The plot of her novel was cheap enough; but her talent embroidered its cinema-film outlines and turned it, with all its defects, into a work of art which found readers.

Perhaps the secret of the whole business is *colour*. The " clever " writers are afraid of colour. Genius is never afraid of it. And the people whose business it is to cater for the crowd have at all events the horse sense to pile it on for all they are worth.

1855

1855

I

Much of my spare time during my ninth and tenth years was spent in a dark, rather cheerless apartment, whose windows were obscured by various sorts of garden bushes and creepers. Its official title was the "morning-room," but with the inconsequence of children, we knew it as the "tank." Down to the "tank" flowed the treasures rejected by our parents: the songs of Samuel Lover (with steel engravings), a large leather-bound edition of Byron similarly illustrated, Dr. Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination*, elaborate editions of the works of Rogers and Campbell, and any number of other outmoded books, which had had to make way for Ruskin and Carlyle, and Tennyson and Browning, and their like. They were stuck anyhow —the rejected ones—on the shelves of two tall, untidy pine bookcases, and nobody cherished them except me. My particular joy, however, was a battered casket of the brightest green enamel, adorned with brass fittings and an elaborate plaque representing an Oriental building, with a number

of gentlemen in the foreground with turbans on their heads, wearing red baggy trousers. This picture was called "Le Palais du Bey de Tunis." When you opened the casket an odour of fragrant antiquity assailed you, coming not from the casket itself—which came, I fancy, from no more romantic source than a legal banquet attended by my grandfather about the year 1855—but from its contents. It was filled to the top with oblong cards of thick parchment, dating from the first years of the nineteenth century, on which had been painted the various symbolic figures represented by the different groups of stars. Each star was indicated, and the card pierced accordingly, so that by holding up the one with, say, Ursa major and Ursa minor on it, to the light, you could learn to discover those groups in the heavens for yourself. I well remember Cassiopeia, a lady in sandals, seated on an Empire chair with a red plush seat, holding up with one hand the insufficient drapery which concealed her lower limbs. Then there was Auriga, in a beaver hat and scarlet socks, nursing a goat and two rabbits, and Virgo, with angel's wings, a lily in one hand, sandals and a plentiful supply of garments. Among the curious beasts, Monoceros, with Canis minor (a very modern-looking black and tan) on his back, and Draco, a creature like the sea-serpent, stick in my memory. Underneath the green casket

rested always a pile of four books: two volumes of the *Drawing-room Scrap-book*, *British Painters of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century* and a volume of *Illustrations to Childe Harold*, issued in the blessed year 1855, by the Art Union of London. These volumes and I became the greatest friends; on Sunday afternoons we were inseparable; and I cannot now smell the odour of old parchment without letting my thoughts travel back to them, and to the green casket in the "tank," under which they stood. The green casket has thus come to symbolise for me all that is meant by "Victorian" when applied to literature and art.

Youth proverbially colours the things it sees with its own vividness, with all the glory that remains to it from the "trailing clouds." No doubt the *Drawing-room Scrap-book* is poor stuff, also the efforts of the gentlemen of the Art Union; yet, coming across the four books the other day, dust-laden in an upper room in the new house to which their owner's vagrant habits had carted them, I seemed to feel nearly all the remembered delight as freshly as if I were once more a child. Looking at them with eyes that find in art their greatest satisfaction (among the moderns) in the work of such painters as Van Gogh, Cézanne, Gauguin, Wyndham Lewis, and Augustus John, I had no sort of friendly disposition towards 1850. Indeed, of all

epochs I regarded it with the greatest horror. (Yet, can it be that my youngest son will find it as delightful as I find the generation that preceded it?) There is much to make one laugh in these old picture-books, but the essential charm of them—when they are charming—has more points in common with the charm of, say, the Russian Ballet, than one might at first sight suppose. Both rely to a large extent on glamour, on all the things which are opposed to realism. Both, in effect, are romantic.

II

The *Drawing-room Scrap-book* for the year 1840 is adorned for the last time by the poetic efforts of L. E. L., a young lady as beautiful as she was unfortunate, and "as accomplished as she was beautiful," who perished at Cape Coast Castle in 1839, and whose early death, according to her biographer, caused a "shock" as violent as that which attended the demise of Byron and of Sir Walter Scott. A good deal of water, you will notice, had already flowed under the bridges since the great days. No apologist, and certainly not myself, will, I fancy, rise at this date and call Miss Landon blessed. She was a quite wonderfully bad writer. *The Arrival*, however, a rhymed dialogue, illustrated by E. T. Parris, with a picture of two girls whose two heads seem to grow out of one

neck—for twenty years I imagined they were joined together, like the Siamese twins—has distinct if unconscious humour. Louisa and Cecilia one afternoon lament the fact that their papa has taken a castle in the Scottish Highlands, where their jewels are wasted, and there is "not a decent neighbour near."

"*Cecilia.* I'm sure our English country seat
Was quite enough of a retreat;
A solitary grand old hall,
Shut up within its high park wall!
And there, at least, was no despair
O'er robes of price too good to wear.

Louisa. No, what with Henry's friend Sir John,
And the young Lord of Erlington,
And Lady Peter's guests, and all
The people from Combe-Merival,
And Captain Mathews and his bride,
And all our London friends beside,
One ne'er pined for a human face
Nor mourned o'er unsunned pearls and lace!
But I protest it was unkind
To bring Court Aspley back to mind. . . ."

If any one asked me why I find this delicious, I should not know what to say. I can only confess that I can still spend a Sunday afternoon over this kind of thing, though I know it to be fatuous. But the pictures are different. There are qualities possessed by these engravings—especially those of Oriental subjects—which are lacking in much

modern work, above all, an extraordinary *glamour*. The gorgeousness of the East must have affected these old T. Alloms and J. Jenkinses profoundly, and in their way of giving expression to their emotion—their minute, painstaking, mid-Victorian way, that knew so well how to give the exact values of satin and cloth and lace, the exact velvety sheen of a dark eye, and from whose ladies not an eyelash could fall without its being observed by their creators—they succeeded, sometimes enormously, where their successors have failed. "The Rajah's Daughter," for instance, by one F. P. Stephanoff, engraved by J. Knight, is altogether delightful. A young girl with almond-shaped dark eyes, pencilled eyebrows and dark hair mostly concealed by a jewelled head-dress in the nature of a turban, is kneeling in the foreground, in a bodice of pearls and an ample dress of transparent flowered gauze over silk, with a long musical instrument like a guitar in her hand. By her side is the lotus, and at the back romantic minarets. In spite of the fact that the values of the different stuffs have been rendered with a meticulous elaboration, and that each minute detail has been put in with care, the picture, nevertheless, remains full of "atmosphere." These details, for any knowing observer who has a strict regard for truth—or rather for "actuality," a totally different thing—may be, and doubtless are,

quite wrong. Yet so strongly Eastern has been the artist's idea that this idea he communicates. And what is art if not "communication"? If there were nothing really Eastern about this picture, it would yet be the quintessence of the East.

Not all the plates are as happy as this, though "The Gipsy Mother," by Robertson, engraved by Greatbatch, is admirably composed, and, but for a touch of forced sentiment in the mother's expression, would be really fine. As it is, the encampment underneath the tree in the distance, on the left of the picture, makes one greatly want to see the original painting. "The Andalusian Lover," by Edward Corbould, is mid-Victorian Romanticism *pur et simple*, reminiscent of Thomas Haynes Baily —the sort of thing from which, had one been a young man in those days, one would most violently have revolted. But turning on to the pictures of places, such as the "New Palace of Sultan Mahmoud II. on the Bosphorus," by T. Allom; "The Tomb of St. George, Bay of Kesrouan," by William Bartlett; "The Great Mosque and the Alcazar, or Dungeon of the Inquisition, Cordova," by D. Roberts; and particularly to the pictures of stormy seas, one finds a spaciousness, an infinite, romantic wonder that seem now to have left us for ever.

III

The magnificence of those black storms, of those dazzling " white horses " which dashed themselves against the frigates' wooden walls, the splendour and romance of them! The coming of the steamer seems to have driven all this from art. True, the commercial painters produce large canvases showing lifeboats rescuing passengers from stranded liners, but they are nearly always mere deserts of inanimate paint. There is no wonder in them. Steam and engineering have practically conquered the elements, and So-and-so's preparations have rendered even the minute discomfort of sea-sickness avoidable. The thought of a storm at sea does not carry the imagination to its loftiest heights now, as it did; the sea, from the standpoint of art, has become domesticated. To be drowned in it is a catastrophe on the same plane as being run over by a motor omnibus, or blown to pieces by a shell. I have met people but little younger than myself who can read such lines as these—

> " O'er the glad waters of the dark blue sea,
> Our thoughts as boundless, and our souls as free,"

without turning a hair. They find nothing in it. " There's nothing much, anyway, in calling the sea ' dark blue,' " they say: " any fool could have

called the sea 'dark blue.'" Or again, "waft," they sneer, "what a stucco word!"

"The sails were fill'd, and fair the light winds blew,
As glad to waft him from his native home;
And fast the white rocks faded from his view,
And soon were lost in circumambient foam."

It is only by inhaling the perfumes that arise from the green casket that used to keep watch over the *Drawing-room Scrap-book* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* that I get the full flavour out of these lines. But what a flavour it is! The palaces, cities and countries, sung by Byron and depicted by those old draughtsmen and engravers, seem to belong to some superb but vanished world, of which Albion and proud Lisboa formed a natural part—

"What beauties doth Lisboa first unfold!
Her image floating on that noble tide,
Which poets vainly pave with sands of gold,
But now whereon a thousand keels did ride
Of mighty strength, since Albion was allied,
And to the Lusians did her aid afford:
A nation swoln with ignorance and pride,
Who lick, yet loathe the hand that waves the sword
To save them from the wrath of Gaul's unsparing Lord."

Gaul and Albion and the Lusians and proud Lisboa—especially proud Lisboa—were places and peoples that Turner certainly knew *all* about, his

followers at least something. Proud Lisboa appears to me radiant, in my dreams, whenever I have had too much supper. I see its great harbour shut in by a line of hills surmounted by gleaming palaces, see the rolling white clouds, the "dark blue" waves all tipped with white foam, the skimming feluccas and majestic frigates—all the pomps and glories of old-time shipping. There, when I go ashore (in my dreams), I find maidens with dark eyes fringed with languorous lashes. They lean down to me, "skilled in the ogle of a roguish eye," from balconies set just within hand-reach, on the sides of palaces of pink stucco; and sometimes they drop red and sometimes white roses into my bosom. There is always the gentle tinkle of a mandoline in attendance, and the murmur of a love-song steals through the window in the evening silence, so that I stop with one hand on the sword-hilt and the other on my heart, prepared for the adventures and abductions and hairbreadth escapes that inevitably follow.

They were drunk, those romantics—Byron, Turner, Hugo, and their hosts of imitators, even down to the compilers of the *Drawing-room Scrap-book*—drunk in the Baudelairean sense, drunk in the way that no "realists" will ever at all be able to understand.

They have, of course, been exploded. Abler

critics than the young friends I have quoted have been at pains to show, in admirably turned sentences of annihilation, that there is "nothing in" "dark blue"—that it is finer art to talk about "'Omer smiting 'is blooming lyre," than about—

> "Sky, mountains, rivers, winds, lakes, lightnings ! ye,
> With night, and clouds, and thunder——"

and so on. To "ye" (even when used by Mr. Kipling) they particularly object. The poetry of a tramp steamer rolling down the Channel with a cargo of tin cans, old iron, etc., etc.—type Masefield—may be new and sweet. Personally I think it is. The professional critic of literature, however, is rarely content to add permanently to the existing list of things that are good. Only a limited number of such, in his view, are permissible. If he add he must simultaneously subtract. To admire the tin cans, you must jibe at this sort of thing, find it false, and strike it from its place—

> "Roll on, thou deep and dark blue Ocean—roll !
> Ten thousand fleets sweep over thee in vain;
> Man marks the earth with ruin—his control
> Stops with the shore;—upon the watery plain
> The wrecks are all thy deed, nor doth remain
> A shadow of man's ravage, save his own,
> When for a moment, like a drop of rain,
> He sinks into thy depths with bubbling groan—
> Without a grave—unknell'd, uncoffin'd, and unknown."

With professional art criticism I am less familiar, but I have no doubt those old engravings, those treasures of my childhood that supported the weight of the green casket, are equally vulnerable. To be sure, they have been disposed of long ago. Who ever mentions their very date without a snigger and a holding up of hands? Yet such is the abiding influence of things loved in one's extreme youth, that, at the risk of shocking the very advanced, I must maintain that the early-Victorians knew a thing or two that an age which prides itself on its omniscience has been unduly eager to forget.

LOW TASTES

LOW TASTES

"If we English could begin to be frank about our low tastes," a friend observed to me, "we could undermine the foundations of our national cant. We could discover where we really stand, and begin to get over our reluctance to say what we really think." Could we? Are the low tastes which we all at times indulge more real than our finer and more presentable appreciations? Most authors, through the pressure of their economic circumstances, have to publish a great deal of hurried and inferior writing. But no one, save their personal enemies or the naturally mean, would think of trying to "place" them by anything but their best work. The good sense of the community leads it to remember the masterpiece and to forget the pot-boiler. The masterpiece shows the real man, the pot-boiler only the commonplace residuum of his intellect. It may be much the same with the average man's tastes. A love of Plato or Plotinus, a passion for Montaigne or Beethoven or Mozart or Mantegna may be an essential part of

the make-up of an individual who in loose moments is perfectly capable of slinking off to see "Tarzan of the Apes," or "The Auction of Souls." In such a case his worthy and avowable appreciations will be much more real, much more characteristic than his supplementary "low tastes." Thus it is arguable that our reluctance to talk about our low tastes is due, not so much to cant, as to an appreciation of the fact that these tastes do not really give a just indication of our mentality, and have no significance.

But there is another school of thought which declines to divide art into high and low, human beings into good and bad, tastes into avowable and shameful. The view of these people is that the really civilised person ought to be sufficiently free from prejudices to be able to appreciate at its proper value everything that is good of its kind from (let us say) *The Adventures of Arsène Lupin* and the figure of Annette Kellermann, to Rembrandt's etchings and the architecture of Regent Street before the irruption of the Piccadilly hotel. They maintain that it is in the use of the word "low," as applied to those tastes which the man of refined sensibilities may share with the multitude, that our national cant displays itself most poisonously. With refreshing paganism they deny that there is anything low in looking at the pretty face and figure of a pretty girl when displayed "on the screen"

or on the musical comedy stage. They find nothing objectionable in those sensuously attractive films which rouse the censor to the use of his scissors, when such films are frankly intended to delight the male eye. (Naturally, for the use of feminine nudity as a bait to lure the public to a "propaganda" entertainment, no one, whether pagan or Christian, can attempt a defence. It disgusts every one save the astounding officials who have charge of our morals.)

The pagan point of view, I confess, appeals to me because—in a world rotting with disease physical and mental—it seems eminently sane and healthy. The human body in perfection is one of the loveliest things known to us, and the instinct which prompts us to enjoy looking at it is one which Nature has planted in us, presumably for the wisest purposes. It is interesting to observe how our film censors allow this instinct to be catered for. Cant imposes what is called "morality" (!). If a "moral" is implicit in the story, all things are permissible. Thus the present state of things is brought about, a state of things which allows the Paul Pry instincts of the morbid adolescent to be indulged to the full, provided only that the "morality film" gives a highly-coloured view of the dangers and the prevalence of syphilis. It is scarcely too much to say that the sex dramas of which our County Councils and similar

bodies are willing to approve, instil into the minds of thousands of young people a horror of normal sexual intercourse—planting at the same time a predisposition to all abnormal and unnatural forms of sexual relief. Such is our "morality"—a morality, surely, of the madhouse! But for the diseased minds of our censors of morals, which lead them to discriminate in favour of sexual pathology, the syphilis dramas which are now being "featured" at so many London cinemas could not exist a week. Neither the public nor those whose business it is to cater for their amusement really like them. But they are accepted, *faute de mieux*, to gratify a normal craving. I suppose "the pictures" must, in any case, be considered rather a low form of entertainment. For myself, on the rare occasions when I go to a cinema, I seldom find them low enough. I like bathing scenes with smiling "cuties" in exiguous costumes; I like masked bandits, sensational abductions, cowboys with revolvers, hairbreadth escapes, pursuits on horseback or by motor. In short, I like almost anything except "classics" and sob-stuff. To see a screen-version of a tolerable novel or of a play by a respectable dramatist would shock my sense of decency. The film-producers, to my mind, should leave the older arts severely alone. I consider *Intolerance* by far the best film-drama I can recall; and this, I fancy,

was written specially with a view to production on the screen. The film version of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, on the other hand, is to me an outrage. I enjoy seeing Chaplin or Mary Pickford and their many rivals. But when the familiar features of some actor or actress from the " legitimate " stage appear before me in a cinema I have to get up and walk out.

Among the most cherished of my so-called " low tastes " is a liking for revue and for musical comedy. I have never sympathised with those high-brow patrons of " earnest drama " who seldom lose an opportunity of sneering at the form of entertainment characteristic of Daly's, the Empire or the Gaiety. I suspect that intellectual snobbishness, combined with an inability to appreciate talent when it appears in unexpected places, lies at the bottom of many of their diatribes. It is astonishing how few people realise what a high level of technical efficiency is to be found even in the choruses of our best musical comedies. It is widely believed that all a musical comedy chorus-girl requires is a pretty face. Endowed with this, our art-snobs imagine that she has nothing else to do but just to walk on and show her teeth. Just to " walk on " ! I will hazard a guess that there are a large number of young women with foreign names waggling their arms and galumphing about before

the inner art circles of London society (and hailed as "wonderful" by many of the critics) who would be denied admission to a good London chorus simply because of their inability to "walk" and their refusal to learn. There is really no public so easily imposed upon as the London public. Frauds who wish to get rich quickly without taking the pains necessary to enable them to learn their business have merely to hang round their necks the "art" label. In London they are accepted at once on their own valuation. All that is required of the "art" dancer is a complete absence of humour, an inexpensive "Greek" costume, an "art" backcloth, an accompanist who knows a little Chopin, bare feet and a capacity to leap and waggle. This is their stock-in-trade: let one of them take it to the stage door of the Gaiety and see what happens. With all their chatter about eurythmics, have they any real sense of rhythm? No. Can they walk? No. Are they in good physical condition? No. Have they enough character to submit to a long and arduous training? Most certainly, no!

The more carefully the work of our best musical comedy artists is studied, I think the greater must be our admiration of their talent. The critics neglect them apparently for no better reason than that the public has taken them to its bosom.

When will the art of Miss Gertie Millar receive the serious attention which it deserves? Who has ever appreciated the genius of Gabrielle Ray? Poor Evie Greene lived and died, immensely admired, no doubt, but essentially unrecognised. The truth is that musical comedy is one of the very few forms of entertainment which has been brought in London to its highest perfection. I was told by a connoisseur whom I trust that the London production of Oscar Strauss' operetta *A Waltz Dream*, with Gertie Millar as Mitzi, was incomparably superior to the original production in Vienna. And one of my most cherished theatrical memories is of the late George Edwardes' production, at Daly's, of *Les Merveilleuses*, with Evie Greene and Gabrielle Ray in the caste. I have never seen anything better than this, *of its kind*, on the English stage. I believe the secret of our success with musical comedy is to be found in the elaborate system of training through which even the despised chorus-girl has to pass, in the amount of sheer hard work which has to be put in by all who wish to master a peculiarly difficult technique and to reach the standard expected by our best producers.

I think we ought to be as proud of our musical comedies as we are (or were) of our music-halls. The music-hall is, I suppose, no longer considered a "low taste," for the simple reason that a great

critic has performed the valuable service of explaining to our art-snobs just how proud we ought to be of our English music-hall stars. Failure to appreciate the genius of George Robey, Vesta Tilley, Little Tich, Miss Marie Lloyd, is at last recognised, not as an indication of ultra-refined instincts, but as a mark of stupidity. Perhaps some critic of genius will arise among us and "discover" our musical comedy stars, in the same way.

In confessing my love for music-halls and musical comedy, and my addiction to the masked bandit of the picture palace, I do not feel that I have run the risk of damning myself irreparably with my modest circle of readers. For these weaknesses, I shall, I fancy, be forgiven. But if I steel myself to own up to some of my vicious tastes in literature —then at once I am on more dangerous ground. I think of the fate of that unhappy man who was gulled into admitting that he had never read a line of Dickens, and shudder. Yet a confession of frailty which is only partial is worse than none at all. Now that I have got so far I must go through with it. So I will own that there are times when Dr. Fu-Manchu is more to me than all the works of Shakespeare or of Mr. Shaw, moments when the exploits of Arsène Lupin or of Dr. Thorndyke thrill me more deeply than Claudel or Mr. Yeats. Such moments, it is only fair to add, are usually late at

night, when I ought to be fast asleep after having assimilated my daily chapter of the Bible. Alas, I have never acquired the habit of reading good books before I go to sleep! Once in bed my taste in literature collapses, and only the most lurid examples of detective fiction will do. (In this vice I have been able to discover no associates. Even Mr. H. M. Tomlinson, a most companionable writer, boasts of a dreadfully improving bedroom library.) The only way I can redress the balance is by affirming that the tastes I display in another apartment (which I will not specify) reach the utmost limits of refinement, and embrace even the Georgians! But on the whole, when I think of my reading during the past ten years, I am put to shame. My good intentions are undoubted. Whenever I find myself in the neighbourhood of the Charing Cross Road I am drawn irresistibly to the bookshops. I finger all the English Classics which I have never read, and rarely come away without purchasing some work without which no gentleman's library is complete. I carry home my volume in triumph, with a pleasant anticipatory thrill. Do I read it? Never. As there is no room on my shelves the new-comers go into a cupboard or on to the floor, and there they remain. I admit, reluctantly, that I am a " cover collector." And if I cannot read the Classics which I failed to

assimilate in my youth, I am very nearly as bad over those modern masterpieces which the fashionable critics never tire of acclaiming with loud yawps. I buy Proust, Claudel, Péguy; and for the hundredth time I find myself reading Mérimée instead. For ten years now I have been preaching Mérimée in London to unheeding ears. Nobody listens to me. Very well, I will enjoy him all to myself. The older I get the harder I find it to read the books I ought to read, and the more closely do I cling to those I want to read, most of which I have read many times before. Give me Mérimée, Turgenev, Flaubert, Christina Rossetti, *Vanity Fair*, and half a dozen travel books about South and Central America or the Islands of the Pacific and I am happy for a week. Turgenev is, I think, the only writer whose *complete* works are necessary to my well-being. Of his writings I would not be without one line. Dostoieffsky I can appreciate by an effort of will, but I have read only *The Idiot* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. I have collected the covers of some of the others, but they are very dusty. I know I shall never open them.

Of books about South America, however badly written, I do not think I could ever tire. When I get to Rio de Janeiro, or start on a voyage up the River Plate, I settle myself in my chair for the evening. I know much more about the history of Para-

guay than about the history of Rome. And if Mr. Lloyd-George, when he is improvising his next treaty, ever wants to know where Bogota is, like Agatha, I can find it for him instantly on my map. As for the Amazon, I know it backwards—I have been there with H. M. Tomlinson, Russell Wallace, Paul Fountain, W. H. G. Kingston and a score of others. Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, Chili are equally familiar. And if any one wants to know what, to my mind, is the finest short story in the English language I will tell him. It is *El Ombu*, by W. H. Hudson.

I realise that by now I have given myself away hopelessly. I have burnt my boats. I shall never gain admittance to the inner circles of the highbrows. I shall never shine at a Hampstead tea-party. (Indeed I do honestly prefer the conversation I can overhear in the saloon bars of obscure pubs on Sunday evenings.) As an " intellectual " I am, as some of my homely friends would describe it, " a bloody wash-out." But, if I believe in anything at all in this world, I believe in freedom of thought and in the possibilities which present themselves in an alliance of those who, being free, yet think alike. I have confessed my low tastes; but I am unrepentant—because at least they are my own.

LOOKING BACK

LOOKING BACK

No writer, I imagine, ever forgets the first guinea earned by his pen, or the moment when he first saw his name in print appended to his contribution. In my case the guinea arrived in 1905, when I was a boy of seventeen, reading for Smalls in a country vicarage in Somerset. I had contributed a copy of verses to *The Academy*, then controlled by Mr. P. Anderson Graham, the editor of *Country Life*, and not only did I receive a guinea, but also an invitation to a banquet at the Dieudonné, given to celebrate *The Academy's* rebirth. I did not go to the banquet, but my excitement at receiving the invitation was enormous, and the number of poems I produced under the spur of this encouragement was colossal!

My University career was short and sweet. Faced with the necessity of earning a living some years sooner than I had anticipated, it was again Mr. Anderson Graham—this time in his capacity as editor of *Country Life*—who gave me my chance. I shall never forget our first interview. I arrived

shaking with shyness, and in reply to his question as to what my literary ambitions were, I murmured, with blushful sincerity, that I wanted to be a poet! This answer must have been irresistible, for I found myself engaged on the spot, not, of course, to write verses, but to learn the severe and solemn trade of sub-editing. The years I spent on the staff of *Country Life* were perhaps the most useful apprenticeship I could have served. I discovered, quickly enough, that to earn a living by the pen is by no means all raptures and roses, lit by purple spots of inspiration. I learnt what hard work meant, and if I had paid more attention to Mr. Graham's salutary criticism I might have picked up the elements of a prose style. For Mr. Anderson Graham is that now rare thing, an editor with a genuine love of letters and a genuine interest in young men whose ambition it is to write. If he had troubled to put into practice those principles of writing clear, straightforward and compact English, which he knew so well how to inculcate, he would surely have been an essayist, and perhaps a novelist of high rank. His great loves in literature, when I was on his staff—and I don't suppose they have changed—were Tennyson and Walter Scott. (He used to tell me that Wandering Willie's tale was the best short story in our language.) Swinburne he regarded as a "minor poet," an opinion which shocked me

profoundly in those days, though I have since come to endorse it. Mr. Graham is an editor of the old school. His great bulk, his enormous dented bowler, big, boyish face, tanned and wrinkled by exposure to all weathers, his tiny, acute eyes, his slow, rolling walk, are unforgettable. He is a Johnsonian figure, a survival from a vanished Bohemia. Long may he continue to carry on—in his ample person—the great tradition!

It was while I was reading the proofs of Mr. Graham's articles for *Country Life*, and writing innumerable little poems at odd moments, that he introduced me to Ford Madox Hueffer, who was at that time contemplating his *English Review*. Mr. Hueffer engaged me to act as the sub-editor of the new venture in my spare time, and my happiness was complete. In those days my capacities for hero-worship were prodigious. Contact with the really great names in our literature filled me with humility and awe. The life of the artist (was I not myself a poet who had earned a guinea?) seemed the most glorious adventure conceivable. I had never at that time encountered a "business man"; for commerce and money-making I had a supreme contempt. All that kind of thing belonged to worlds which I had never explored and did not want to explore. I never heard anything about them at school or at Oxford, certainly not among

my mother's friends, who were exclusively religious, and ranged from the then Bishop of Ripon (Dr. Boyd Carpenter) at the head, to the youngest local curate. Religion, which in its orthodox forms I loathed, art and letters, which I loved, were the two soils in which I had been nurtured, so that my translation to Ford Madox Hueffer's review was like a translation to Heaven. Whatever else it was—and I still think it was one of the most brilliant editorial adventures in our literary history—Hueffer's review was certainly not commercial.

My first duty under my new chief was to accompany him on a week-end visit to Joseph Conrad, who was then living in a farmhouse near Luton in Bedfordshire. Hueffer was curiously mediæval in those days. He was the last of the Barons, travelling with his retinue. I was the retinue. My rôle was to be silent, attentive, respectful and obedient; and I believe I played it to perfection. It was a dripping wet winter evening when we arrived at Luton. Editor and " retinue " got into a stuffy fly, which very slowly splashed its way along the country lanes to Conrad's door. The house was surrounded by trees and seemed unutterably melancholy, ghost-haunted and eerie. The rooms were dim and candle-lit. Conrad, as I remember him, was a broad-shouldered, stooping man, with bright brown eyes and very charming

manners; and he talked a queer exciting mixture of French and English. After dinner we went to his study on the first floor. I hid on a sofa while my host and my employer talked to one another endlessly about Flaubert's technique, about Emma Bovary's drive through Rouen with her lover, about the marvellous closing paragraphs of *Un Cœur Simple*. The perfection of that wonderful *conte*, then first revealed to me, has been a joy ever since. The life which Flaubert led in his hermitage on the banks of the Seine, when, with prodigious energy and patience, he built up his masterpieces, was surely the life of a saint—one of the most romantic lives of which we know the details. I felt it first that evening. Conrad talked eagerly, with many shrugs and gesticulations, and for hours I sat listening to Hueffer's high, querulous drawl blending with his deeper, more staccato notes.

The English Review was edited in a flat over a poulterer's shop in Holland Park Avenue. Sometimes gobbets of blood, oozing from the suspended carcases of rabbits, made the threshold positively unsafe. But it was a delightful flat when you reached it, though as an editorial sanctum it always struck me as being slightly eccentric. Hueffer also, it must be admitted, was a slightly eccentric editor. When I arrived, after my day's work on *Country Life*, I was usually dispatched to the

Shepherd's Bush Empire to secure a box or two stalls for the "second house." Here we used to repair, evening after evening, with the manuscripts which had accumulated during the day. Hueffer would hold the manuscripts on his lap, and while the jugglers hurled golden bottles at one another with prodigious violence he would dictate his letters and decide their fate. But the moment Victoria Monks, or some one of the kind, made her appearance, then the cares of editing were at once forgotten. The manuscripts slipped unheeded to the floor and we both enjoyed ourselves. So far as I can recall, at least the first five or six numbers of *The English Review* were edited from the Shepherd's Bush Empire. That they were none the worse for it, those who possess file copies can see for themselves.

The flat seemed always full of people. I remember particularly the merciless practical jokes of Mr. Percival Gibbon, and Mr. Scott-James' sombre benevolence. Then there was the spectacular figure of Mr. Cunninghame Graham (whose illegible handwriting I had to try to decipher), Mr. W. H. Hudson, tall, white-haired, black-eyed and silent-footed, Violet Hunt, Edward Thomas, Wyndham Lewis, Ezra Pound, Stephen Reynolds, Edward Garnett, Edgar Jepson, and a host of others whose names I cannot recall. Thomas

Hardy I once saw in those rooms—a little, quiet, grey man wearing a red tie, who discussed in a weary voice the ailments of his younger relatives, while all round him the latest lion-cubs pranced and roared.

Conrad was there fairly often in the first months of our existence. I remember one occasion when he enraged me so frightfully that I seriously thought of challenging him to a duel. He was discussing with Hueffer some new book on which he was engaged. It was a very technical conversation, writers' shop, and not particularly interesting. But at intervals of about three minutes Conrad would turn to me and say, "Now, Goldring, you must remember this is strictly confidential. *I know what journalists are! No paragraphs, please!*" I got a riper and riper scarlet, till I nearly burst. If there was one thing in those days of which I had no doubts whatever it was that I was a creative artist. A journalist indeed! A pedlar of literary gossip to halfpenny newspapers! I can tell you, it was bitter. Conrad, I am sure, had not the faintest notion how deeply he was insulting the callow youth who sat and glowered at him!

Among the many amusing experiences of those days I remember particularly a visit to The Pines at Putney. It was in May 1909, about a month after Swinburne's death, and the object of my call

was to negotiate with Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton for one of Swinburne's posthumous MSS., an article on the plays of Francis Beaumont.

After my arrival at the house I was left to cool my heels for about fifteen minutes in a very pleasant, but—as it seemed to me—rather commonplace drawing-room, in which a few pictures by Rossetti and by some of the lesser pre-Raphaelites were the principal indications of the house's special character. At last the door opened and a little shambling figure came in to greet me. It was Watts-Dunton. He seemed to be about four feet high. He was dressed in a long, shiny, black frock-coat, and wore white woollen socks. He had on black spectacles, and his white hair was long and unkempt. He came towards me across the room with both his little arms outstretched, caught my hand (as if by a lucky shot), after several unsuccessful efforts, and shook it quickly up and down. But in spite of his queer appearance I remember being immensely impressed. Watts-Dunton had undoubtedly the manner and bearing of a "personage." Nowadays I notice many attempts to achieve this manner, both among my contemporaries and among the leading men of the generation before me; but I can think of no instance in which the effort can really be called a success. The Victorians must have had a certain style about them. Modern conditions perhaps

prevent its recapture. Nowadays, as far as my own experience goes, almost the only writers who really have a "presence" are the Dublin poets and journalists.

We discussed (at rather tedious length) the merits of Swinburne's poetry. Watts-Dunton claimed that Swinburne had not yet received his due as one of the greatest nature poets in the whole range of English literature. He was writing a book, he said, to prove it. Then we talked of the merits of the article I had come to buy, and finally we got down to hard business. I found Mr. Watts-Dunton a keen bargainer, and it was soon evident that on one side of his character he was an astute and highly capable man of business. We tussled amicably over the price to be paid for the "American Rights," and I remember that his lowest offer was exactly ten pounds more than the highest price which I was authorised to bid.

Before getting up to go, acting under advice, I made some halting references to *Aylwin*, a book which to this day I must confess I have never read. (At a safe distance I am prepared to admire it immensely.) No sooner had I blurted out my little compliment than the old gentleman scrambled to his feet and made me the most charmingly ceremonious bow. So I hastily got up from my arm-chair and returned it, with as much grace

as I could muster. Youth and age saluting one another!

Aylwin was evidently a favourite topic of conversation with its author. In measured, rather guttural tones he expatiated on the prodigious success it had attained, attributing this success to the exciting nature of the story. He recounted endless anecdotes about Victorian heroes who had sat up all night to finish it, unable to lay it down. From the financial standpoint he regretted bitterly having allowed it to appear in "The World's Classics."

The discussion of *Aylwin* had the effect of loosening his tongue, and he settled himself in his chair and discoursed to me for a full hour on literary matters. Referring to *Country Life*—I told him that I was connected with that paper—he remarked, "It is a most beautiful publication. All of it is charming, even the advertisements!" He spoke also of Mr. Anderson Graham's novel *The Red Scaur*, of which he had the highest opinion. By some accident the long review of it which he wrote for *The Athenæum* was not inserted. To this misadventure he was inclined to attribute the fact that the book had not a larger sale. I was charged to convey an urgent message to Mr. Graham, begging him to write another novel of "country manners and pursuits."

Returning to the subject of Swinburne, he described him as the last of the old generation of poets and the first of the new. "Speaking now, a month after his death, I tell you that this country has yet to appreciate him fully. The time will come when he will be still more highly thought of even than he is to-day." He mentioned "Hertha" as being an example of a type of nature poem which future generations would appreciate enormously. His view of Swinburne seemed to be that he was a poet in advance of his time. He seemed genuinely surprised at the tributes made to Swinburne in the Press. "I had no idea he was held in such respect and veneration." He added, as I got up to go, that Swinburne's death would immensely increase his "sales," and thus the market value of his copyrights! I went off wondering whether, after all, Hueffer would rise to that extra ten pounds.

Some months later, when I published my first little book of poems (now happily forgotten), I sent a copy to Mr. Watts-Dunton, and received a very flattering letter in reply, which contained an invitation to me to go again to see him at The Pines. But for some reason or another I never went, nor did it ever occur to me to advertise his favourable comments at the head of my reviews. Looking back I am astonished at my own *naïveté*,

at my juvenile fine feelings! Not only Watts-Dunton, but even Mr. Joseph Conrad, and several other eminent literary personages, wrote me flattering letters about that "little brochure," as one of them described it. If they would only do the same thing again, I feel sure that my enterprising publishers on both sides of the Atlantic would "wireless" their encomiums up and down the world within a few hours. Can't you imagine it? "Eminent English novelist says Douglas Goldring's poems show extraordinary promise and remarkable powers of expressing deep emotion in simple and beautiful language." Well, we live and learn—too late.

Stephen Reynolds was for a time a constant visitor at the flat in Holland Park Avenue. He was a very lovable man, but I have rarely detested any book as much as I detested his novel *The Holy Mountain*, of which it was my duty to read the proofs. My hatred of this story became a standing joke. It has persisted to this day, and I still think that Reynolds was that rather rare thing among writers, a greater man than his works.

In the course of my sub-editorial duties it often fell to me to run about London calling on contributors. Bernard Shaw was one of the people on whom I had to wait. I cannot now remember

what it was I had to see him about, but I have a vivid recollection of his beginning the conversation on the landing of the floor above, while I was sitting in his dining-room. He rushed in, in the middle of one sentence and rushed out before the end of another.

Mr. Max Beerbohm was a particularly agreeable celebrity to call on in this way. He talked on every subject under the sun except the business in hand, and made me ill with laughing. As I had always been a great admirer of his works, it was delightful to find him as amusing and as "nice" as one could possibly have expected. Those were days when affectation among literary men was carried perhaps to a higher pitch even than now. But the great Max, as I remember him, was absolutely unaffected, natural and charming.

Looking back eleven years, the temptation to belaud a past epoch is strong upon me. And yet I cannot be sure whether it is I who have changed or the atmosphere of literary London. To me, in those days, it seemed that men really did care for literature for its own sake. A man would take a pride in praising his enemy's book. And it was a saying (I think of Hueffer's) that "one doesn't crab another fellow's benefit." A generous attitude, that. Is it fashionable to-day? I hardly think

so. And looking back it seems to me that in those days there was more than a show of critical detachment among the men who took criticism seriously—that there was, indeed, more serious criticism. The aspirant to literary fame did not attack Society first, and produce the goods only after he had made elaborate preparations for their reception. On the contrary, there were genuine discoveries, and the discoverers were disinterested. Were they? Or do I only imagine all these things? Did I give credit where none was due, out of ignorance? And do I only think that the English world of letters has now deteriorated because I know it is so much better? I give it up. Youth covers everything it sees with something of its own romanticism. Perhaps one's eyesight at twenty is not trustworthy, and perhaps young men—at least in pre-war days—were too apt to credit their elders with possessing their own unspoiled idealism. But of some things one can be certain at any age, even at twenty. Kindness at least is always recognisable. My memories of ten years back are in this respect uniformly happy. No young nobody from nowhere could have been treated more generously by his elders than I was. I hope the experiences of those who are beginning their writing life in 1920 are equally pleasant. But perhaps the boot is now on the other leg. Youth has come into its own, and

(quite rightly) will " thank you for nothing." It is the middle-aged who are now in need of encouragement and help, at the hands of their juniors. They rarely get it; and more rarely still do they deserve it.

INDEX

Academy, The, 9, 10, 12, 213
Æneid, The, 18, 19
Akenside, Mark, 185
Anderson Graham, Mr. P., 213, 214, 222
Angell, Norman, 85
Arsène Lupin, The Adventures of, 200, 206
Athenæum, The, 222
Aylwin, 221, 222

Barbusse, Henri, 94, 106
Barker, Granville, 15, 16
Battaille, 17
Beaverbrook, Lord, 151
Beerbohm, Max, 225
Beethoven, 199
Belloc, Hilaire, 85
Bennett, Arnold, 43, 70, 85, 147–156
Blackwell, 42
Blast, 135
Bouvard et Pécuchet, 141
Bridge of Fire, The, 9, 29, 31
Bridges, Robert, 112
Brooke, Rupert, 96, 101
Browning, Robert, 185
Burke, Thomas, 180
Butler, Samuel, 59
Byron, Lord, 119, 185, 187, 193, 195

Café Royal, The, 138, 139
Cannan, Gilbert, 39, 59–63, 85, 177
Carlyle, Thomas, 185
Carnival, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46
Cézanne, 187
Chaplin, Charles, 203
Chesterton, G. K., 85
Clarté, 94
Claudel, Paul, 206, 208
Clayhanger, 153
Conrad, Joseph, 173, 216, 217, 219, 224
Corelli, Miss Marie, 180
Country Life, 213, 214, 215, 217, 222

Dane, Miss Clemence, 172, 173, 174
Davies, W. H., 118
de la Mare, Walter, 112, 113, 117, 118, 119
Dell, Miss Ethel M., 180
Dent, Messrs. J. M., 11
Dickens, Charles, 206
Don Quixote, 57
Dostoieffsky, 176, 208
Douglas, Lord Alfred, 9
Drinkwater, John, 108
Duchess of Wrexe, The, 54
Duhamel, 106

Edwardes, George, 205
Egoist, The, 136
Eliot, T. S., 119
El Ombu, 209
English Review, The, 72, 136, 144, 215, 217, 218

Evans, Caradoc, 180
Evening News, The, 143
Everybody's Husband, 60
Everyman, 17

Farrère, Claude, 17
First Love, 46
Fitzgerald, Edward, 19
Flaubert, Gustave, 141, 153, 208, 217
Flecker, James Elroy, 1–35
Fort, Paul, 13
Fortnightly Review, The, 13
Forty-two Poems, 11, 13, 30, 31
Fountain, Paul, 209
Frankau, Gilbert, 111
Fu-Manchu, Dr., 206

Galsworthy, John, 85
Garnett, Edward, 218
Gauguin, 187
Gautier, Théophile, 179
George, W. L., 85
Gibbon, Percival, 218
Gibbs, Philip, 106
Gissing, George, 125–132
God, the Invisible King, 96
Gogh, Van, 187
Golden Journey to Samarkand, The, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 30, 31, 33
Goschen, Max, 11, 14, 15, 17, 21
Graham, Stephen, 56
Graves, Robert, 105, 119
Grecians, The, 26
Green Mirror, The, 54
Greene, Evie, 205
Guy and Pauline, 49, 50

Hardy, Thomas, 112, 154, 173
Hassan, 15, 16, 18, 21, 23
Hichens, Robert, 180
Hilda Lessways, 153
Houseman, A. E., 116
Hudson, Stephen, 178, 218
Hudson, W. H., 209
Hueffer, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 135, 215, 223
Hugo, Victor, 20, 94
Hunt, Violet, 218

If All These Young Men, 175, 177
Inquest on Pierrot, 60

James, Henry, 40, 52
Jean Cristophe, 60
Jepson, Edgar, 218
Joan and Peter, 93
John, Augustus, 187
Joyce, James, 143

King of Alsander, The, 6, 14, 15, 21, 25
Kingston, W. H. G., 209
Kipling, Rudyard, 29, 112, 114, 195

Lanterne, 17
Last Generation, The, 25
Latzko, Andreas, 106
Lawrence, D. H., 27, 46, 63, 67–78, 112, 113, 119, 143, 173
Ledwidge, Francis, 118
Lee, Vernon, 85
Legend, 172
Lewis, Wyndham, 135–144, 187, 218
Little Review, The, 144
Lloyd, Marie, 206
Look, We Have Come Through! 72, 73, 113
Lover, Samuel, 185

MacGill, Patrick, 106
Mackenzie, Compton, 39–51, 59, 62, 63
Mail, Daily, The, 95

Mantegna, 199
Martin Schüller, 176
Masefield, John, 60, 112, 195
Matador of the Five Towns, The, 152, 156
Mathews, Elkin, 6
Mendel, 62
Mérimée, Prosper, 179, 208
Michael and Sylvia, 50
Miles Dixon, 60
Millar, Gertie, 205
Milner, Lord, 57
Montaigne, 199
Morel, E. D., 85
Morning Post, The, 17
Motley, 113
Mozart, 199
Mr. Britling Sees it Through, 92
Mr. Perrin and Mr. Traill, 58
Mr. Polly, 21
Mummery, 60
Murray, Gilbert, 22
Murry, J. Middleton, 175, 176, 179
Muse in Arms, The, 101
Musset, Alfred de, 20

Nan, 60
Nation, The, 16
New Grub Street, 125, 126
New Statesman, The, 17
Nichols, Robert, 110, 111
Nietzsche, 143
Noel, 60
Northcliffe, Lord, 87, 92, 112

Old Mole, 62
Old Wives' Tale, The, 153, 156
Omar Kháyyám, 19
On Heaven, 113

Passionate Elopement, The, 42
Philippe, Charles Louis, 137
Phillpotts, Eden, 154
Pickford, Mary, 203
Pink Roses, 60
Plato, 199
Plotinus, 199
Poetry Review, The, 104
Pole, The, 135
Poor Relations, 50
Pound, Ezra, 218
Pretty Lady, The, 154–155
Private Papers of Henry Ryecroft, The, 131

Rainbow, The, 70, 71
Ray, Gabrielle, 205
Redding, Cyrus, 159–168
Renard, Jules, 17
Return of the Soldier, The, 180
Reynolds, Stephen, 218, 224
Richard Kurt, 178
Robey, George, 206
Rolland, Romain, 60
Roll Call, The, 156
Romains, Jules, 137
Rossetti, Christina, 208
Round the Corner, 62
Russell, Bertrand, 85, 91

Sassoon, Siegfried, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 119
Scholar's Italian Book, 25
Scott-James, R. A., 218
Scott, Walter, 214
Secker, Martin, 39
Secret City, The, 56, 57
Seeger, Alan, 105
Shakespeare, 206
Sharp, Evelyn, 85
Shaw, Bernard, 19, 85, 88, 91 206, 224
Shelley, Percy, 119
Sinister Street, 41, 46, 48, 49
Sitwell, Osbert, 105, 109
Skiadaressi, Mlle. Hellé (Mrs. James Elroy Flecker), 11

"Solomon Eagle," 17
Sons and Lovers, 46, 71
Sorley, Wilfred, 105
Soul of a Bishop, The, 92
Spectator, The, 16, 17, 115
Squire, J. C., 1, 85
Still Life, 175, 176
Strauss, Oscar, 205
Stucco House, The, 62
Swinburne, 214, 219, 220, 221, 223
Swinnerton, Frank, 132
Sylvia Scarlett, 50
Symons, Arthur, 32

Tarr, 136, 137, 144
"Tarzan of the Apes," 51
Tatler, The, 176
Tennyson, Alfred Lord, 29, 185, 214
Thirty-six Poems, 11
Thomas, Edward, 218
Thorndyke, Dr., 206
Three Pretty Men, 62
Tich, Little, 206
Tilley, Vesta, 206
Time and Eternity, 60, 61
Times, The, 17, 95
Tomlinson, H. M., 207, 209
Torrents of Spring, The, 46
Tree, Sir Herbert Beerbohm, 50
Trespasser, The, 78
Trollope, Anthony, 147
Turgenev, Ivan, 46, 208
Twilight in Italy, 72

Un Cœur Simple, 217

Vanity Fair, 208
Virgil, 18, 19, 22, 23

Wallace, Russell, 209
Walpole, Hugh, 39, 52–58, 59, 62, 63
Watson, William, 111
Watts-Dunton, Theodore, 22[illegible], 221, 222, 223
Waugh, Alec, 180
Wells, H. G., 21, 81–98, 173
West, Rebecca, 180
White Peacock, The, 70
Wilson, President, 88
Wilson, Romer, 175, 176, 179
Windmills, 59
World Set Free, The, 89

Yeats, W. B., 206

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